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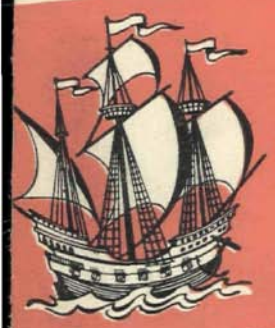

THE SHORT STORY MAGAZINE

MARY STEWART

RAY BRADBURY

GEOFFREY HOUSEHOLD

BRIAN CLEEVE

JACK COPE

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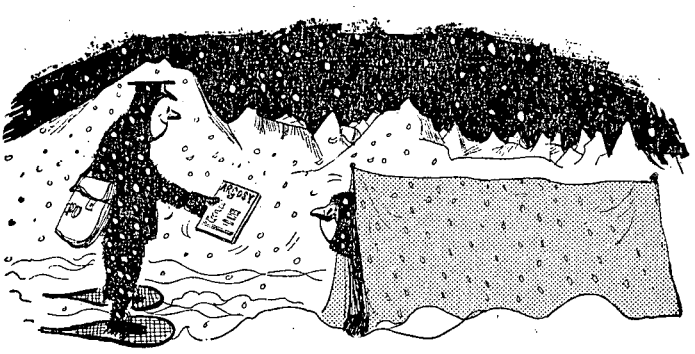

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ARGOSY

A Fleetway magazine

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Log Book

SUBLIMINAL advertising plays such a part in our lives nowadays, we are told, that even when we think we are most harmlessly occupied—eating breakfast, say, or hard at work in the office, or simply waiting for the fellow ahead to realise that the light has changed to green—we are actually receiving messages, nineteen to the dozen, which are going to affect all our future actions.

When a man strolls into a bar and orders a bitter he may think he's acting out of free-will, but he's wrong, poor misguided automaton: it's because someone has told him that beer is best. Why, for heaven's sake, they even guide footballers hypnotically in their sleep these days.

Recently we learnt with gloom that people can get into a bad state of tension by struggling to put up unconscious resistance to all these unperceived promptings. Determined not to get that way ourselves, we decided that the only solution was to try to register *consciously* all the cunning admonitions that lie in wait at every corner.

For a start, we realised that every day for the past twenty years our train as it approached the terminus has passed a notice that read: Wear Glacé Kid Shoes for comfort and fashion. The subconscious resistance set up by this must have been truly terrible, for never in the course of that period do we recall one single solitary mildest urge to buy a pair of glacé kid brogues.

Farther along the line another notice told us that Lead is Best. This, too, must have set up some agitations in the minds of commuters as their poor harassed ids attempted to find out, by trial and error, what lead is best *for*. Boot soles? High blood pressure? Anyway, how can lead be best if beer is also best? If

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both are best, one of them—surely it follows—must be better.

Making towards our office along Fleet Street we saw a small sign at knee height which had hitherto escaped our conscious eye.

This said merely Foam Inlet and was plainly a piece of information intended to be absorbed by all pedestrians against the possibility of some dire emergency, presumably a detergent flood as all the national dailies suddenly wash each other's dirty linen at once.

LONDON DROWNS UNDER TORRENT OF FOAM

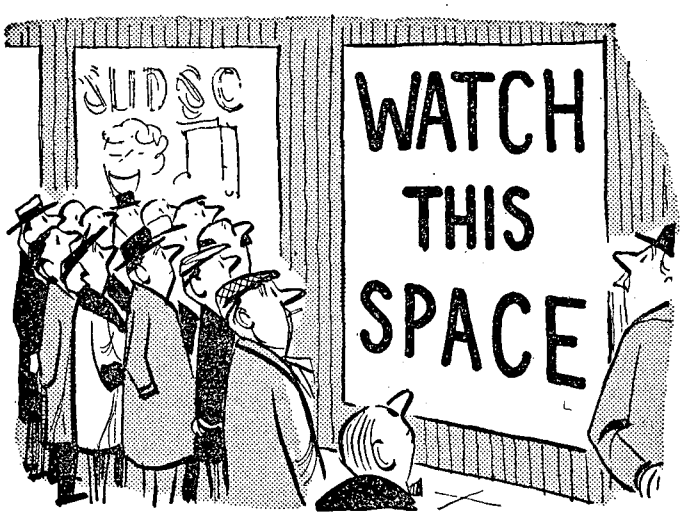
Inlets Lost Under Suds

At all events, *we* shall be ready. Just past the post office, on the south side, not far from the Law Courts.

Arrived at Fleetway House we found that it was stuck all over with the most meaningful and gnomic messages whose meanings we must have been absorbing heedlessly for years. For instance two doors let into an outside wall state simply and mysteriously: Sprinkler Stop Valve Inside.

It's good to know that. We still haven't found out where to start the sprinkler (for confetti, perhaps, or reviving fainting office brides?) but it's reassuring to know it can be turned off.

Another notice said: Dry Riser Inlets 130 ft. on right, 120 ft. on left, and this, we must confess, had us utterly baffled. It seems to have a vague connotation with fishing—perhaps an underground Fleet River dry-fly anglers' club where, when the



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fish are rising, members may repair for an hour's sport . . . The only other risers we can think of are on staircases, and they are always dry.

But unquestionably our favourite subliminal notice is a very small one, set very low down near the main portals of Fleetway House, which bears the terse legend: Smoke Extract. Not yeast, not liver, but the purest and richest smoke, to give directors that final soupçon of Havana as they step out to meet their business acquaintances.

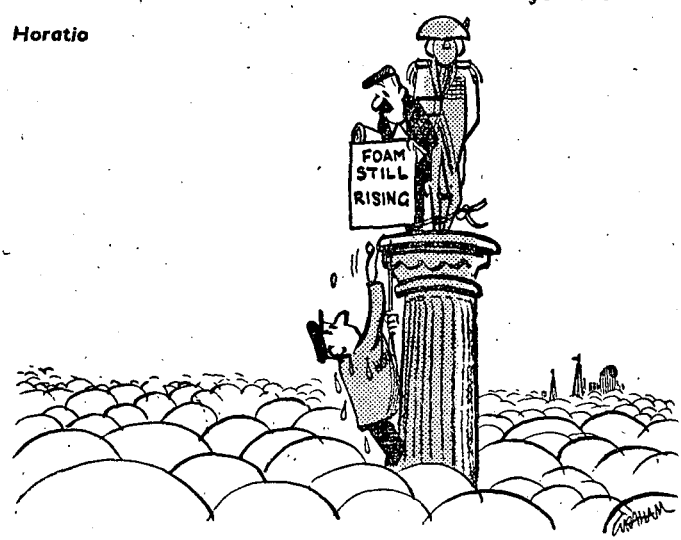
Now we are alive to all these bits of guidance, we shall of course begin to obey them. Any day now the entire staff of Argosy will turn up for work in glacé kid shoes. And then, dear readers, look out for surprises. But in the meantime and always, don't forget that Argosy is Best.

Jack Cope was born in Natal in 1913 and has been in journalism all his life, first in Durban, later in Fleet Street. Now back in South Africa, he lives in Cape Town and writes biographies, novels, poems, short stories. First novel: *The Fair House.*

William Mayne lives alone in Yorkshire, writes to please himself, and prefers children to humans. He is well known as a children's writer (among his titles: *A Grass Rope*, which won the 1957 Carnegie Medal, and *A Swarm in May.*) He lists his hobbies as listening to Bach, Bentleys, and gossip.

JOHN SILVER

Horatio



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STONEWALL'S GHOST

The water was black glass—
the full moon climbing astern

BY JACK COPE

KLEINHANS stepped along in the rough white sand and white pebbles and whitened limy shells. The glare hurt his eyes. He was pale and there was a transparent blueness round his eyesockets, but his lips were red, burning, and dry.

His faded blue shirt had a big rip in the back and he wore khaki trousers frayed at the bottom—then a stretch of wiry sun-peeling ankles down to the small feet slipping about in oversize rawhide velskoene.

The cold wind that always got up off the sea in the afternoons flapped his clothes. He pulled down the peaked cap hard and hugged his arms over his chest.

He was coming along the shore path under the low headland and making for the village. Ahead of him the rocks ran down a jag towards the beach, and once beyond the point he would come in sight of the fishing harbour at the head of the bay, and above it the village.

The sea was slaty and opaque under wind gusts, sunlight flashed big glints off the turning rollers and struck colours in the blown spray. He felt the spray cold on his skin and the wind was cold, but the sun behind him pushed a warm finger through the hole in his shirt and touched his neck.

He halted, seeing someone on the path down at the point. He knew who it was, of course, and it was too late to go back, so he screwed up his shoulders a little and went on.

When he came up she just said gently, "Kleinhans."

He glanced at her aslant. "Middag, Alida," he answered, stepping aside from the path but going on. She had been gathering coral seaweed, a few big fan-shaped pieces of the marvellous sea-pattern, red and mauve-pink, that tourists liked.

"Where are you off to, Kleinhans?"

"The village." He jerked his head in that direction.

"Not to the harbour?"

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He stopped and half turned. Still hugging his chest, he could feel how his heart slugged and now he coloured up hot. " You know damn well where I'm going. All right, I'll say it. I'm going to the canteen and I'm going to drink until my money's finished or till they throw me out on the beach, whichever's first. And I hope that pleases you—a lot you care."

" You have no right to say that, Kleinhans."

" I have said it, then, and can I go catch my words back out of the air? " He laughed and began coughing heavily.

" What a torment it is you bring down on yourself and everyone near. Kleinhans van As, you could be a boat-owner and the leading man here one day—but look at you . . ."

" Ja, look at me."

" You make enemies of everyone."

" Forget about it," he said, " I have got my friends."

He walked on and she looked after him. She was eighteen and she had left Kleinhans. She was going to marry Willie Momsen and she should not have said that about boat-owners.

Willie had taken over the fishing-boat *Malmok* when Kleinhans could not keep up the payments. It had been a fair deal.

The *Malmok* was the most beautiful craft in the southern sea and it was like the gull it was named after. Norwegians had made it and there was not an unsound fibre in all its length and beam. Down to the last cleat and nail it was a thing of pride. They had sailed it half round the world—its engine never missed a beat and it laughed at storms.

Kleinhans had bought the *Malmok* on good terms at Walvis. His loss of it had not been the first blow but the last. He had fought and brawled and jeered at the meaner types and at skippers and owners up and down the coast.

He had wanted to take Alida to the west with him but her father stopped it.

And when he got back she would not see him. He knew why. He knew Willie Momsen was nothing to her. She was taken to an aunt on a farm near Treurfontein and Momsen went to see her there in his car. You could not sail the *Malmok* over the mountains to Treurfontein.

A thousand times in his heart Kleinhans had said, " To hell with her."

Instead of going up to the village he kept to the shore, following the white curve of the bay.

She watched him until his figure got lost behind some of the older thatched cottages where there were long wooden frames of fish-drying stellasies with the bunches of silver doppies and flecked yellow-tail and snoek out in the sun and salt.

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Beyond that were sheds and the cove where the boats had once been pulled up out of the open sea. Then the wall and pier of the new harbour and the big square patch of calm water full of small craft moored alongside or anchored at the buoys.

In the middle of the harbour at its own buoy and a proud distance from any other was the white and pale grey hull of the *Malmok*, with touches of blue on its funnel and lifebelts.

Kleinhans could see the *Malmok* too as he went along. It hurt him to look. He felt Alida's grey eyes under the sunbonnet would be on him, and deliberately he went on without turning. He could still get her back—why had she come out on the path? She knew he was living at Groenewald's tumbledown place at Mosselklip.

Willie Momsen was away in Cape Town on some business trip and would not be back until late. Willie skippered his own boats and would skin-dive with the men for abalone—called perlemoen along the coast—but he was the kind who never took a chance. He never went down without full kit, an air-pipe and compressor and a second diver, in case of accident.

Now Willie was using *Malmok* as his flagship. He skippered her and had two other boats. Maybe the price of getting Alida back was to be respectable, a boat-owner.

When he got to the skeleton of an old wrecked boat-hull half down in the sand, Kleinhans stopped. He wanted a drink and he would have it later—she was not stopping him. But meanwhile he did what he liked. He found a place where the boat timbers made a shelter against the wind and the sun beat down hot on the sand. First he sat there, back to the wreck; then rolled over on his stomach and lay full out with his face on his arms.

He pretended to be asleep, hearing footsteps come quietly up to him in the sand. They stopped and whoever it was remained nearby, silent. He guessed who it was; nobody else around the place would come singling him out except to risk a snarling quarrel or a fight. Presently he opened one eye and looked from below his cap peak.

First one voice said, "Bwana!" And then another, deeper, voice followed.

Slowly he coiled himself up again and sat in the hot sand hugging his knees. Without thinking he smiled into the two bronze-black faces.

"Huh, Stonewall; huh, Jefferson," he said.

They brought a wild, unfathomable feeling into him. To the devil with everyone! They were life to him, especially Stonewall. Not merely that Stonewall had saved him from drowning; that was incidental. They would all three do the same for the others

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and they were bound together by a disregard for their own lives that amounted to a kind of mania, an absolute summing up and finality of courage since it was unthought of and accepted without question.

The two were "brothers," they said. That meant they were cousins or clansmen or maybe no closer than belonging to the same sub-tribe. Chavimzaba was their clan, and they had taken on new names—Stonewall and Jefferson—that gave them some sort of standing with the whites. Both were small, slim, well-knit, and their faces grave, at rest, like black Arabs. They were not Southern Bantu but Nyasas from somewhere far inland on the Central African lakes.

They came south against all chances, against the regulations and police vigilance, and once they saw the blue ocean something happened in their hearts that was like a young bird taking the freedom of the sky. They became black hawks of the sea: Vikings. If a skipper got a Nyasa boy he hung on to him. There were still quite a few Nyasas about the boats and in the location back among the sand-dunes.

Kleinhans had not gone out of his way to collect his two. They had come aboard the *Malmok* once when he was preparing to go to sea, and with a glance at them his heart had jumped. He had not said a word, just a nod at the foc'sle cabin and they were as good as signed on.

That night, as he stood at the wheel and the Southern Cross blazed over his shoulder and Orion plunged headfirst towards the Atlantic, he had heard the Nyasas singing, and the tears suddenly streamed down into his beard. He felt shame that like a woman he could be moved by other men's sadness. Yet he was glad, too.

It was no ordinary sorrow that wandered from them over the ocean, but a strong burning of men's hearts.

That was what he meant when he told Alida he had his friends. He would not say who they were. Maybe she would understand, maybe not.

Stonewall and Jefferson themselves would be overcome with shame if he blundered out any words of friendship. Stonewall, particularly. He was like a small, alert night creature, delicate to every sound and sense. He certainly knew how firm and clear was the bond between them, and his high standard of pride made it a law that he acted well once his allegiance was given.

"I am not going out," Kleinhans said at last.

The two men squatting in the sand made a faint sighing sound of disappointment. "Your hired boat is ready. We put tar in the leak. We put kit with boat. Ready go fish."

"Listen to me, Stonewall—for the last time—"

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"Haa." The soft sound and a wounded look in his black sloped eyes.

"I am not sweating in a bloody hired boat with a motor that's not worth a tin can. I can't pick my fishing ground, I can't get far enough to beat the others. Who are the three highest catchers on the coast? Yes, we are. Evens, we beat every crew that ever dived for perlemoen. But now they laugh at us. They choose the grounds and they take up twice what we do for half the work. They have machines and pumps and air-pipes and . . . Shut up! I'm talking. Get this straight, fishing—finished!" He made a sweep with the flat of his hand.

The two men looked at each other and back at Kleinhans. Each wore a white cloth tied over his hair and knotted at the back and old jeans rolled up to the knee. Side by side they squatted on their haunches facing him, and he felt vile and desperate with them making those slight sighing sounds of sorrow or distress or whatever it was, and Stonewall dropping his eyes if he caught a straight stare.

"Finished!" He had raised his voice and then half grumbled to himself, letting a handful of sand run through his fingers, "I'll do what I damn well like, and they are not having the grin on me. If they want to see me down and out they have got a long wait coming."

He caught the puzzled frown. "All right, Stonewall. I thought of you, and Jefferson. You see my hand. I would cut it off for you."

Stonewall made a tongue click and shook his head uneasily. "I can't take you with me, see. I mean, I go to Cape Town. I am going to school there again, to college. I'm not good enough for some people here. But I'll come back and have my master's ticket and I'll be in a boat too big to get into this god-damned harbour. There will be a place for you, Stonewall, and you, Jefferson, if you are still here. So I thought of you, I got you jobs where you get twice what I can pay. You work for Mr. Momsen, you work again on *Malmok*."

"Haa," they murmured together.

"You start with Mr. Momsen today. You don't hold your breath when you dive. You have a mask and air-pipes and you walk about on the sea-bottom like you are herding cattle, and you reap the perlemoen off the rocks like Kaffir-corn." He tried to smile, raising his eyes. But they weren't smiling.

"Well, that's how it is. Finished, klaar. Take my kit out of that boat and put it back in the shed. One more thing. I owe you for the week. Here's a pound each. The rest I pay before I go." He put the two blue-green notes on the hot white

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sand and a wind eddy from behind the wreck fluttered them.

"Well, what are you waiting for, man? It's your money, why don't you take it? Stonewall, pick it up before the wind blows it away."

The little man shook his head, standing up in one clean movement. He was wringing his hands together. He wanted to reach out and touch the white man.

Kleinhans looked up and saw his eyes were wet. "Damn," his lips framed, silent. "Damn, damn."

"Bwana, we do what you tell."

Kleinhans did not look at him again. He heard the men's bare feet go off in the sand. The wind lifted the notes and blew them against his velskoene and then skidded them along the beach. "God, they did it!" He rolled over on his face again, "They left that bloody trash."

He lay a long time without moving, a dark red emptiness under his closed eyelids. He wanted to sleep or to get up and run away and hide himself. It was not cold there; the sun, getting lower, still struck gratefully on him and only now and again the wind nagged round in eddies, sprinkling him all over with fine sand.

He could not stop thinking of the *Malmok* in the harbour, tugging gently at her moorings, and the men getting ready, Stonewall and Jefferson among them.

If he was skipper he would go out on the evening tide and be ready over the best perlemoen reefs when the light came; the sea motionless like ice and no wind.

Stonewall and Jefferson dived without any kit beyond an eye-mask, a long tough-bladed knife, and a net. Deeper than four or five fathoms he got them to take reserve bottles of air, but they preferred to come up like seals for a breather and they had never worked with air-pipes.

They were like eels in the water, fast and agile, and when he or the other divers, with all their rubber skin-suits and jerseys, were blue and teeth-chattering with cold, Stonewall and Jefferson were ready for another dive.

Kleinhans had gone down once close in to the reefs on a treacherous spring day with nearly an hour's supply of air. A lot can happen in an hour. He knew where the *Malmok* was anchored and could reach it in minutes. The rocks were clustered so thick with full-sized perlemoen that the shellfish seemed almost jammed together. He would need a few minutes at the most to fill his net. Beyond him, the reef fell away into an undersea canyon so deep he could not see bottom. But looming down there was something which looked like a ship's wreckage.

He had left his net with its line and red marker-buoy and swum

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down to have a closer view. It was a wreck of a big steel ship not more than thirty-odd years old. He hadn't heard of it before and he thought of going on to find its name and poke into its holds for imperishable cargo—zinc or tin or lead that would bring him enough in salvage to pay off the *Malmok* and keep him at college.

He had a good look round. He could make out the name *Phalarion*, but all he found was bunker coal. He was surprised when he next checked on his watch—the hour had nearly gone. He could not find his net and he reckoned they had pulled it up. So he surfaced. And coming to the top was one of his biggest shocks.

A tearing wind had sprung up and the sea had gone wild. His air-bottles were almost empty. Bobbing around on the broken swell he had quite a range of vision as he topped the crests.

First and foremost, there was no sign of *Malmok*. Nobody but a madman would have risked her on the reef when the squall rose. He understood that.

The crew had done the right thing and there was no hope of being picked up by *Malmok*. As for the dinghy—well, a dinghy could not make this sea or come out against the wind. He was a mile from land and that was his only hope, to swim ashore and trust on hitting a beach and not the bare rock.

He did not think much of his chances, but he struck out. He had been going twenty minutes when he heard a shout, and there coming up behind him was the dinghy.

It was doing the maddest things in the gale, and alone in it, like a wizard keeping it afloat by something more than human power, was Stonewall. He never made out how Stonewall got him into the boat and kept it from being swamped.

He was nearly dead with cold. Of course they could not turn back, and Stonewall rowed down the wind, straight for the rocky coast. Kleinhans was steering and Stonewall shot the little craft between two blinders and across the surf-line. The dinghy was wrecked but Stonewall got him ashore.

Afterwards he had a kind of shame about losing the dinghy and on a trip making for the west coast he squared his account.

Malmok had her new dinghy in tow, rounding the Cape, when they ran into the foulest Atlantic rollers. The dinghy was trying to leap clear of the water. And then the towline parted and it was good-bye to No. 2 boat. Kleinhans knew it to be death to get *Malmok* across the trough of the rollers and there was no circling to pick up the boat. He put the engine into reverse and slowed, and then he saw the black naked body of Stonewall dive over the stern.

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Without a word he had gone into the icy current and was swimming like a seal. He got the towline of the dinghy in his teeth and began trying to swim back. It was too heavy for him to make much way, but *Malmok* was able to reverse, pick up the towline and Stonewall, and keep her bow into the swell.

When Kleinhans got the boat tied secure and the trawler moving ahead again he called Stonewall and knocked him down backwards with a stunning crack over the eye.

" No boat is worth a man's life," he said, helping Stonewall up. Stonewall rubbed his face and grinned ruefully.

That night as he steered north leaving the lights of Cape Town far behind, he heard the Nyasas singing a new song. He knew it was the song of the dinghy, or of the two dinghies. Gaily it sounded, and he figured in it somewhere.

Once he had got them to teach him a Nyasa song. It was about a girl whose man died. She went to the river and called out the two-headed watersnake, and it said she could have her man back if she gave it her baby. That was an old, old song with long, sad harmonies in which the singers interwove their voices in a difficult way.

His two coloured crewmen thought it strange for a white man to sing Kaffir songs. But what would any other white man have thought? " Kleinhans van As has not got all the calves in his kraal." Meaning he was daft. He did not care what they thought.

He lay in the sand and the afternoon was getting thin and cold. Someone came by and halted there.

" Hullo, Kleinhans," a voice said. He recognised it as Willie Momsen's but he did not stir a muscle. " I thought I would just say thanks for those two Nyasas of yours." Still he did not move.

" I'm going out tonight," Willie said. " Be on the fishing grounds by daylight, at low tide."

Momsen went off after that. He guessed Kleinhans was awake. Maybe he also guessed how raw and torn-up he was.

Half an hour later Kleinhans heard the pom-pom-pop! of the Diesel motor start, levelling out into that smooth, thrilling purr of pure unbridled power. He kept his eyes closed. He could not bear to see *Malmok* go out, steered down the tide by Willie Momsen.

During the night the Nyasas came out on deck and squatted together with their backs to the galley house. The wind had died and the only stir was the passing of the vessel. The water was black glass, the full moon climbing in the sky astern.

Stonewall and Jefferson began singing. They did not discuss it but their hearts were in unison as they made up a new song.

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Stonewall took the recitative, and his brother harmonised or sometimes came in under Stonewall's higher tone with a vibrant hum.

The song was about Willie Momsen. It had a detailed description of his parentage and his father's lack of liver. Out of this union sprang Willie who, besides other things, was a hermaphrodite and had six toes on each foot.

His heart was a wallet crammed with pound-notes and his toes were stuffed with half-crowns that rattled and chinked dismally as he walked.

Momsen came up from the cabin and stood talking to the man at the wheel. "It was a stroke of luck getting Kleinhans' Nyasas."

"It was."

"They are the best on the coast."

"No doubt—I've seen them at it."

"Listen to them singing."

"Ja, I been listening."

"Kind of beautiful, eh?" Momsen said after a bit, calm and drawing on his pipe.

"Ja, pretty nice. Considering they are Kaffirs."

"Well, that's why they sing. They are a happy-go-lucky lot."

"Sure, they don't think much."

"I wouldn't say that. It's far from home for them. A night like this. Well, it's . . . it's strange. It's sort of heartrending, the little fellows here out of their element and without a note of music or anything, and they can put up a show like that. Take a Gamatijie—unless he has a bottle of drink and a guitar he can't grind out a squeak."

"That's right."

"Or one of us. What do you sing when you're stone cold sober?"

"Me? Nothing."

"And when you're drunk?"

"Damned if I know."

"But listen to those two, they've really got something. They make me feel like a kid."

Momsen went aft and looked out at the Quoin lighthouse flashing away on the horizon. The course was correct and the boat running at half speed. The moon-path lay along the black water.

Next day, as soon as the sun was high enough to strike into the water, they began diving. It was shallow water and so Stonewall and Jefferson went down without air. Momsen looked after the

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compressor and he watched the other men but specially the Nyasas, active as eels.

If they came up at the same moment and saw each other they would flash out a brilliant smile; a word and a laugh rippled over the still green water.

It was so clear that he could watch the divers at work on the bottom and see the fish cruising round them, unscared and curious, waiting to pounce on any torn fragment from the perlemoen.

The coloured boatman in the dinghy was kept busy hauling up the nets from the bright-painted marker buoys, and the lockers of the divers were filling with shellfish. The Nyasas were ahead with four or five hundred each before the midday break.

Momsen had his rubber skin-suit on deck and he went down twice during the morning to relieve the white divers and give them a chance to thaw out in the sun. The water was cold, just on fifty degrees.

By lunch they had cleared most of the rocks of shellfish above the legal size, and when Momsen moved out into deeper water to start again it meant everybody using air-pipes. Stonewall and Jefferson were more alarmed about the apparatus, the pipes and new-type masks, than about the sea or sharks or the tangling kelp.

Momsen helped adjust their masks and belted on the air-valve cock at their sides. He explained how you turned the air supply on or off with your right hand and he sent them down for short practice dives to get used to the kit. Then they took their nets and knives and made their first real dive. Momsen watched the pipes and pressure dials carefully.

He was a little anxious about the Nyasas. Their courage and their cheerfulness were impressive and he did not want any accidents.

Soon he saw something was wrong with Stonewall's air supply; the pipe was jerking and the pressure built up. Stonewall was not getting any air and the depth was six or seven fathoms. Bubbles were rising—that must be from the other men. He had decided quickly to pull in Stonewall on the air-pipe when suddenly about fifty feet away the little Nyasa burst to the surface.

He had wrenched off his air-mask and came up bare-headed, took a great gasp, and sank again.

By this time Momsen was hauling in the air-pipe hand over hand. Everything else was calm and still and there was no sign of danger or death except the skipper feverishly hauling in Stonewall on the bright red pipeline.

The heavy diving kit was keeping him down, but he was

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coming in by yards a second. Momsen could see him now through the green water, a big dark object. The pipe was attached to his waist but he was gripping it with his hands, too.

Momsen got him alongside and first his hands then his head came up into the air. He was alive all right, he moved his head and a gush of water came out of his mouth. There was only six feet to go to have Stonewall over the boat's side on deck and Momsen crazily began hoisting him on the pipe.

As he came up out of the water the weight increased. Momsen was a powerful man and to him the ten stone of the fisherman and his kit was a light weight.

Stonewall was hanging clear of the water when the pipe snapped and slipped through his convulsively clutching hands and he fell back like a rock. He went straight down.

Momsen was a strong swimmer, but he did not dive at once after Stonewall. First he shouted to the boatman to come alongside and take over the watch. He grabbed his skin-suit and started climbing into it, he pulled on his frog-feet, strapped his helmet and mask, and checked the air compression. Say that took him five minutes. He was ready, but he was five minutes too late.

He went over with a splash and dived. The two white divers had surfaced and they were amazed to see him disappear and leave the *Malmok* to herself. The boatman was not yet on deck. Momsen found Stonewall on the sea-floor and brought him up. They all helped lift him on deck and worked on him.

But he was dead.

On the way back to harbour they gave Stonewall's body into his brother's care and the Nyasa did not say anything. He did not cry or complain. He knew what had happened and his silence added to Momsen's feeling of wretchedness.

Jefferson got a spike and string and he folded up his brother close the shape he was when he lay in the womb, and sewed him in a blanket. The *Malmok* returned at full speed and that was what they brought ashore in the dinghy about ten o'clock the same night, a bundle sewn up in a red blanket.

Alida had come down, seeing lights at *Malmok*'s moorings out in the harbour basin, and she got to the jetty just after they had landed Stonewall's body.

Jefferson was standing silent near the shape.

Momsen told her what had happened. "I believe he bumped the air-valve cock with his elbow. Any diver knows how to turn on the air again. He knew, I showed him myself, but he must have panicked—yes, he panicked."

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Alida sensed by his manner there was something more he had not told her, she guessed his cowardice and his hand in the fisherman's death. He drove her home to her father's house, and after he had gone off to report to the police Alida walked down the single village street to the Imperial Hotel, a one-storey iron-roofed canteen. She went in the lounge and sent the night watchman through to the bar to call Kleinhans van As.

There was a big noise going on in the bar and she wondered if Kleinhans was there or if he had been beaten up and thrown out hours before.

The door from the bar opened with a burst of noise and there was Kleinhans. He stood for fully a minute and then turned and slammed the door in the faces of the men clustering behind him to stare. He came across and tried to bow.

"Mejuffrou Wessels," he said. She felt sick at his red puffed face and bloodshot eyes and the thickness on his tongue that made his effort at sarcasm disgusting.

"Kleinhans, try to listen to what I say."

"But nachrally—"

"Be quiet and listen. Your man Stonewall is dead. They killed him diving at sea— Be quiet and let me finish." She told him exactly to the word what Momsen had said and added nothing. He had fallen into a chair and his face had gone deadly white. Long after she had stopped he still sat there, staring downwards and gripping the table edge.

"Do you understand what I have said, Kleinhans?"

"Thank you, Alida. Leave . . . this to me."

By the time Kleinhans reached the harbour the jetty was deserted. The village had turned in to sleep. The power plant had been shut off for the night, and beyond a window here and there with a dim candle he could see no sign of anyone astir.

Stonewall's body had been taken ashore and Momsen had gone to see the police in the district centre.

In the moonlight Kleinhans could see *Malmok* out there like a silver gull asleep in the water. He walked down the shelving of the slipway, knelt between the boat-rails and cupped up water to splash in his face. The lap of a slow swell wet his knees. He did not move away. And then, without knowing it, he was sobbing.

He put down his hands for support in the shallow water and hung his head, and the sobs shook down his spine, stabbing him with pain and horror and shame. Another small wave lapped at him and another before he struggled to his feet.

He felt sober now, cold and ill.

He went to the boat-shed and took out his frog-feet and

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a steel crowbar, and then he stripped and waded down into the chilling water. It made him gasp and draw heavy breath.

Getting across that stretch of open water and keeping afloat with the weight of the bar was utter hell. His heart was near bursting and he would never make it; he thought of dropping the bar and giving up his plan. Or he would go down with it—he had only to hold on to it and stop struggling. *Malmok* seemed miles off.

Then his head scraped on the mooring cable and he reached out and took hold of it. He got up and on to the deck and for a long while, swinging away into moments of half consciousness, he lay on the planks recovering his strength.

Then he stood up and smoothed his wet hair back off his face and went to work in the bright clear moonlight with the crowbar.

He started on the compressor, smashing at it methodically. It was not a difficult thing to wreck—he burst the castings and got the steel point in and wrenched and tore at it.

As he worked, his body warmed up and a berserker madness swarmed as a black cloud over his brain.

He rushed at the deck-house and smashed the heavy glass. Everything inside he drove at wildly; he shattered the compass and wheel and radio set. Momsen had installed an echo-sounding device to locate deep-sea shoals and he shoved the bar through it with one blow. It was quite light in the deck-house but down below in the engine-room he had to grope about, knowing his whereabouts from memory.

Now he was killing the little ship herself. He crashed and levered at the Diesel motor, grunting as he felt the metalwork give.

And at last he felt the moment had come that he had been putting off through all the orgy of destruction. He was going to scuttle the ship.

He raised the crowbar, sharp point downwards, and brought it with a thump against the bottom timber. Once, twice. He stopped and felt with his fingers at the deep four-sided holes he had made in the wood. No water was coming in. It was like feeling at the wounds of a living thing.

Malmok, he thought, his own boat. He had done his worst and he could not sink her, he could not murder her. What in hell had he been doing? But not that. The last thing would live within him for ever as a black sin, the foulest thing he ever did.

Momsen had killed Stonewall, of that he was certain, and now he had avenged the little Nyasa. He could not add to it the sinking of the beautiful *Malmok*. That was not in any call between man and man.

Kleinhans went up on deck and dropped the crowbar without

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a sound or a splash into the water. He dragged on his frog-feet and swam ashore.

One thing he had done—he had saved the boat *Malmok*, but he had saved it from himself. He had given away Stonewall's life to Momsen and now he had given away the right ever to regain the fishing-boat. He had to start again somewhere else.

The first to go aboard *Malmok* the following day was Jefferson, taking a line from the dinghy carrying her crew. Momsen had offered him time off, but he had refused and brought another Nyasa to fill Stonewall's place. He stood on the deck, staring, and the others had to tie up and come crowding after him.

He walked about, peering at the wreckage with a strange air of certainty. He was not surprised.

Momsen noticed it. The others noticed, too. He even smiled.

"What's this, Jefferson?" Momsen came up to him. "Did you know it had been done?"

"No, bwana."

"What are you so happy about then, damn it?"

"Bwana, Stonewall—his spook been here. He done all smash-up."

"Oh, for heaven's sake."

"Stonewall spook come back night-time. He leave ship. Bwana Kleinhans, his ship."

The Nyasas buried Stonewall in the bush, sitting in his grave facing the west inside the red blanket and with a knife and an assegai and some plates of food. They lit a fire and beat on empty oil drums and the people of other races and tribes stood round in the ring of firelight, watching.

Jefferson was not downcast and Kleinhans looked at him with pain and absolute bewilderment. And when they spoke, Jefferson told him Stonewall's ghost had come back and smashed up *Malmok*. The ghost was free now and would return home with his blankets and personal things, home to Nyasaland.

"Jefferson, I did it. I smashed up *Malmok*."

"No, bwana. Stonewall—him do it."

"I tell you I swam out there and I bust up the boat myself."

Jefferson smiled and bent his head respectfully, but he had a knowing look in his eyes.

"You and Stonewall, bwana. You help him."

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LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP

Leap Year Day is a refund disguised as a bonus

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MOTHER AND THE ROCKET

It had blazed its way successfully into space

BY JAY MANDER

I HAD never seen Father move like this. I had never seen him sprint like an Olympic champion. He whizzed along the terrace.

Normally Father was the most sane and balanced and discriminating of men. Each evening he returned home at a brisk modulated pace, head erect, chin up, moving with the ease and fluency of a Guards officer. I would toot three short blasts on my whistle to herald his approach to Mother.

But not tonight. Tonight was different. Father hurtled up the path like a cannon ball, collar and tie askew, bowler hat bouncing its way across the lawn. I had a blurred impression of his wet, shining face as he cleared the front steps in a single leap.

I promptly shrilled six long blasts on my whistle. This indicated an acute emergency.

There was a tremendous crash in the kitchen and Mother rushed into the room. She darted a frightened glance up at the ceiling. "Your father home so early?" Her dark silk curls fell round her white oval face and she began to circle like a radiant star. Her slim fingers joined in a graceful knot, and sharp little lines etched their way across her smooth brow.

"Something's wrong," she exclaimed worriedly. "Something must have happened . . ."

"Lydia, get me some sandwiches and a flask of tea." Father's head showed briefly above the banisters and withdrew.

Presently he came down the stairs. He wore a thick grey woollen jersey and knee-high rubber boots; his mac was over his arm and he carried a torch.

"Dinner will be ready in an hour," said Mother, with perfect calm.

"Can't stop for dinner." He fussed with the belt of the mac. "Have you got the sandwiches? Fetch my gloves, Tommy. It'll be cold out there during the night."

Mother's composure was completely shaken and she gave a

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tiny gasp of alarm. No dinner? Never in the entire history of the Blake household had Father been known to sacrifice dinner. She said nervously, "Why can't you stay? Henry, what's happening?"

"You mean you haven't heard? The village is aflame with the news. It's come down."

"What's come down?" Mother pounced like a kitten on this tangible evidence.

"The rocket. The rocket that was shot into space." Father produced a balaclava helmet, a relic of his former service days, and shook it free from dust. "It was traced over this area last night . . ."

I listened with growing interest. I was aware of some of the fundamental laws of the universe; I knew that all sorts of animals—dogs and mice and monkeys—were whirling over our heads. This might be my very best chance to obtain a pet.

"Rocket?" Mother clicked her teeth in annoyance. "The wireless said it came down in the sea."

"That was to deceive everyone," Father eagerly explained as he tugged the balaclava over his head, "put them off the track, focus public attention in the wrong direction. It came down here. All sorts of people have arrived in the village to search for it."

Mother slowly straightened herself; and her blue eyes widened. "You mean you prefer chasing about in the night after a rocket to enjoying the comfort of your own home?"

"Mother," I interrupted politely.

"Silence, darling." Her hands settled on my shoulders like white birds and perched there. She went on recklessly, "I knew this day would arrive. I knew it. I was warned about this. This child, this house, the home I have struggled to maintain—none of it means anything to you."

Father took not the slightest notice of her and her cheeks reddened. "Very well, go. I hope you enjoy yourself—and your walk!"

"Mother, he can't hear you while he is wearing the balaclava." It was my chance to speak.

She plucked it from his head as she would a feather. "I hope you enjoy your walk," she shouted.

"I'll take Tommy with me." Father rammed the sandwiches into his pocket.

"What?" Mother was shocked and circled her arms round me in love and protection. "Take this poor little child out into the freezing night air to tramp the countryside? Indeed, you will not. He stays here with me."

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"Now be reasonable, Lydia." He gently tussled with her hands. "Time is precious. I need him as a guide."

How this argument might have ended I have no idea; but it was terminated by the shrill peal of the telephone.

"Yes." Father's knuckles drummed excitedly on the table. "They have? That's wonderful news. I'll meet you at the corner in two minutes." He replaced the receiver and picked up the torch. "That was Ben Wilson, Lydia. He and I are going to search together. If we find the rocket, we share the reward."

An enormous change occurred in Mother. She suddenly trembled, and the pulse of her throat throbbed at an alarming rate. "Reward?" she said quickly. "What—what reward?"

"A thousand pounds has been offered by the Americans for information that leads to the recovery of the rocket, but now the Russians are offering two thousand."

We listened as Father's hurried footsteps died away in the silence. Mother remained motionless, staring at the mirror on the wall; she seemed sapped of all life and energy and vitality, her liquid body frozen. "Two thousand pounds," she said in a husky, choking whisper. "*Two thousand pounds.*"

The next moment Mother's blue-clad figure streaked along the hall. She sped through the kitchen and raced down the garden path at a far greater velocity than Father.

If Father had stayed for dinner he would have learnt where the rocket was. Father would have learnt the rocket was at the bottom of the garden.

Its beehive shape lay neatly at rest under the apple tree near the greenhouse. It was an entire nose cone, its surface gleaming faintly in the dim light of a pale moon. Through a jagged rent in its side, delicate instruments twinkled brightly.

"That piece is gold, Mother."

"Gold?" She uttered the word in a hushed tone of reverence. "What an intelligent boy you are!" She stooped and patted the rocket affectionately, as if it was her very own child. Her wide eyes glistened and her features glowed with animation. "London, Paris, New York," she murmured dreamily. "A car, golf clubs, dresses."

She rose to her feet and became intensely practical as the chimes of the village clock intruded upon us. She performed mental gymnastics with her fingers and the names of amazing luxuries formed on her lips. Suddenly she jerked to an abrupt halt, and her keen gaze flashed downwards.

"If it was worth a thousand pounds—now two thousand

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pounds—then tomorrow it might be worth . . ." She knelt down again. Our rocket had infinitely expanded its financial potentialities. In place of London, Paris, Rome, it offered us New York, Tokyo, Honolulu.

It was a tremendous decision for Mother to face. She had never experienced anything like this. She was almost torn apart by inner conflict before she at last gave a deep, tremulous sigh. "There's the gold to consider," she said thoughtfully. "Run to the shed and get two spades—quickly, darling."

By midnight we had finished. Some big bales of hay now loomed up under the apple tree in the darkness. Mother inspected anxiously. "I do hope the neighbours don't notice anything amiss. There's often a bale or two in the orchard. And remember, not a word of this to your father. Not a single word."

"Mother, shouldn't we inform the authorities? It may turn out to be dangerous if it has been in space."

"Nothing worth two thousand pounds could possibly be dangerous," declared Mother firmly.

Next morning Mother hurriedly filled me with breakfast and leaned at my side like a beautiful blue flower. "Finished, darling? Now run down to the village and get the latest news about the reward."

Mother was certain the reward would have risen. She was positive. She had remained awake almost all night, her mind centred on this one thought.

A clear gold day greeted me as I went down the steps. The sun rose warm and bright and hot, and the landscape of brown and green and white stirred under the breeze. I became aware of intense activity as I went along the lane; men were in the fields, searching under the hedges; cars shot past, spurting up fountains of dust; a helicopter hovered in the sky.

A large number of people were gathered in the market square, standing in isolated groups. I saw Billy Turner hemmed in by two different types of men; on one side, men like bears, with heavy sombre faces and long black beards; on the other, men like puppets, with pink cheeks and butterfly ties. A profusion of cameras, guns, binoculars, radios, lunch bags, sticks, was scattered among them. These men were undoubtedly the Russians and Americans—and both groups were engaged in fierce argument to secure Billy's services as guide.

The moment I was observed, Russia and America reached my side with equal speed.

"We need guides, youngster. We're paying a pound an hour."

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" Twenty-five shillings, comrade."

" Thirty! "

" Thirty-five! "

All over the square there was brisk demand. Parents rapidly disposed of their children for cash. Susan Peters went for twenty pounds. Billy capitulated for a handful of notes, a gold watch, and a new camera. He led his party away in Indian file.

My own value soared to staggering proportions as each second passed. My mother's mission promptly fled from my mind. Russia and America pushed and shoved against me, they thundered and roared over me like huge waterfalls, and like a little piece of England I hopped about on my toes between them.

But then Uncle Frederick appeared. He charged towards us like a bull, head lowered; his squat hands plucked me to safety.

" Thank you, Uncle Frederick," I said cautiously. " I must return home now with a message for Mother."

" Home? " He retained a tight grip on my jersey. " Go home on a beautiful morning like this? Nonsense, Tommy. Your mother can wait—I shall explain to her later. This is a delightful opportunity for us to enjoy a stroll in the nearby fields, drink in the liquid gold . . ." His voice ended in a dry croak.

I examined Uncle Frederick carefully. His usually good-natured face was a dusky red and his brown eyes glittered. His lips were pale and cracked, and a fine mat of bristles coated his chin and cheeks. His suit was crumpled, and his shoes plastered with mud from a night out of doors. I needed no second thoughts to tell me I was now his prisoner.

" Glorious morning for a stroll." He made a strenuous attempt at heartiness. " We'll go in the direction of the marshes —we might see this rocket everyone is talking about . . . "

An hour later I was still in his company. As we entered the woods Father staggered past us in slow motion and mumbled an incoherent good morning. He did not even notice me hidden away on the far side of Uncle's corpulent figure. Father looked tired and weary and desperate; his eyes swollen and glazed with despair.

I wondered how desperate he would be when he discovered Mother's tactics.

" Haven't we seen enough, Uncle? "

" Enough? " He hastily assured himself I was within arms' reach. " One cannot see enough of the magnificent beauties of Nature," he said generously, and strode on scanning every inch of the ground.

It was clear to me that Uncle Frederick was a victim of mass

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hysteria, that any appeal to his reason would be lost. But there were other methods of approach.

I said cheerfully, "I had pineapples and cream and bacon and eggs and hot toast and coffee for breakfast. What did you have, Uncle?"

He groaned and clutched at his stomach with both hands. "Let—let us go on, my boy," he said shakily.

"Fresh juicy slices of succulent, yellow pineapple, thick with cream; sizzling, crisp bacon—"

Fifteen minutes later he slowly toppled over like a battleship and flattened out the grass. His wreckage gave a long, agonising sigh of relief and his eyes gently closed.

"Good-bye, Uncle Frederick," I said politely. I immediately turned and sped on my way home to Mother. At the garage I learnt that the reward was now three thousand pounds. She would be pleased.

I was surprised to find Mother exercising her artistic abilities as she stood at the bay window. She was inscribing a large white card with swift, expert strokes of the brush:

GUESTS TAKEN

Accommodation was very scarce in the village owing to the influx of visitors. Plainly, Mother intended to help.

"Mother, Uncle Frederick has collapsed in . . ."

"What a pity!" She glanced up and down the terrace. "Perhaps we can retrieve him later. I couldn't possibly leave the house until this affair is settled." She tensed as a man came into sight above the hedge. He ambled slowly, his whiskered face a mask of puzzlement. He peered across at the notice on the sill.

Mother wasted no time. She whipped the golden-crusted pie from the table and dexterously balanced it out of the window. Its surface steamed temptingly in the bright sunlight.

The Russian's face lit up in a wide beam of pleasure. He almost snapped the gate from its hinges in his frenzied haste.

"Come in, come in," cried Mother joyously. She dragged the bewildered man into the house.

Presently Mother welcomed another guest . . . and then yet another. I had never seen her so excited as she hurried from room to room.

Eventually, she handed me two food parcels and dispatched me with instructions. "The large one is for Uncle Frederick. The small one is for your Father. Tell your Father I shall expect him home to dinner."

As I went down the steps an alert young man in a dazzling shirt passed me. "Have you a room to spare?" he inquired.

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" I certainly have," said Mother briskly, " step inside."

I discovered Father in the garden of the Coach and Horses. He was shouting threateningly, " You won't serve me with lunch? You won't serve me after all these years . . ."

" Sorry, Henry." George Kemp gave a mild shrug of broad shoulders. " I must consider my guests first."

It was difficult to appreciate this was my own father. His eyes were red and inflamed, and he made savage noises like an animal as he tore open the parcel. His hair was a tangled web of untidiness, and his chin liberally coated with fuzz.

" Couldn't your mother have sent more than that? " He groaned in exasperation as he lay slumped across the seat.

" She expects you home to dinner, Father."

" She does? " He raised himself perceptibly at the thought. " Well—well, perhaps. Meanwhile . . ."

There was no escaping my own father. We set off towards the marshes and he stumbled along at my side. We passed Uncle Frederick on the way, and I deposited the food parcel on his chest. He made no movement.

It was a cool and gracious afternoon. I found much to interest me as Father prowled under hedges and whacked at bushes with his cane. A helicopter ticked its way across the sky like a dragonfly.

But even the longest afternoon must end. As dusk fell, Father came to a weary halt and dabbed his brow. " I'm not at all sure this has been worth it," he gasped. " Let's go home."

The door was opened to us by a pleasant-faced young man wearing a shining brown leather jacket with a zipper down the centre. He shook his head regretfully. " Sorry, bud, we are full up."

" Who was that? " Father was astounded. He gazed at the closed door in astonishment and then leaned forward and groped for the brass number plate. " Yes, this is it," he muttered.

He flung back his head and let loose a tremendous roar. " Lydia! Lydia, where are you? "

" Here I am, darling." Mother appeared at the upstairs window. " You're a little early for dinner," she said brightly. " Will you go round to the kitchen entrance? "

" I will not! What's going on here? " demanded Father.

A tall thickset man walked out of the sitting-room. He wore a green velvet smoking-jacket and a scarlet waistcoat with silver buttons. A white meerschaum pipe protruded from between his brown stained teeth, and his long black beard reached his snake-skin belt. He muttered a guttural apology as he passed.

Father's astonished eyes followed him as he went up the stairs.

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" Nothing," Mother smiled uneasily. " I've merely taken in a few guests to ease the overcrowding."

" You might have consulted me in this matter."

" But, Henry darling, how could I? You weren't here."

Father rubbed his hard bristles with a grubby hand. " How many? "

" Darling, why don't you go into the kitchen and get cleaned up ready for dinner? "

Father's chin rose perceptibly. " Why should I go into the kitchen when we possess a modern bathroom? I asked you how many guests are there? "

" Fourteen," said Mother and scuttled away.

" Fourteen! " bellowed Father. " Lydia, come back here at once."

Dinner was a silent affair and was eaten in the kitchen. We waited ages until Mother had served her guests. Father wolfed his food and stared gloomily at the vase of roses.

" Henry." Mother watched him anxiously.

" What is it now? " he said stiffly.

" You don't mind sleeping in here tonight? "

He banged the table with a fist. " I certainly do mind," he shouted. " I will not sleep on the kitchen floor. I tell you I will not. I'll sleep in my own bed tonight if I have to tear down the walls of this house."

" But, Henry, you can't." Mother tugged the edge of the cloth. " The room—it's occupied."

Later I helped Father carry the blankets from the cupboard and arrange them on the floor. This operation was conducted in the coldest silence I ever experienced.

During the night, Father suffered a terrible nightmare as he twisted and turned and groaned restlessly on his hard bed.

Small wonder that Father looked so white-faced next morning as he staggered to his feet near the kitchen sink. He eyed Mother with misgiving as if she were a beautiful, treacherous mermaid, picked up a towel, and stepped over her. He returned almost immediately, his cheeks flushed with rage, and gesticulated wildly. Russia and America had gained complete possession of the bathroom. " You're allowing this to go too far," he shouted. He threw down the towel and stamped into the garden to await breakfast.

Replenished with food, his pockets full, he quickly recovered his fever for the hunt and joined in the search. This was to set the pattern for the days that followed. The rocket remained missing and more men arrived.

Excitement pulsed in the air as various false alarms were raised.

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Each evening Mother sat alone at the kitchen table and carefully assessed her budget. It was here that Father served her with his complaint. "I wish to speak to you, Lydia." He folded his arms. "I take it you are aware that the picture of my old ship has been removed from above the fireplace?"

Mother smiled nervously and licked her lips.

He gripped the back of her chair and leaned over it. "Can't you see what's happening? Can't you see that these people are robbing us? They are systematically removing the house from about our ears; we shall be left with nothing but a brick shell."

"I'm sure it will work out all right, Henry."

He pulled open the drawer of the table. "Lydia, where did you get that money?"

The drawer was full of currency. Crumpled old blue pound notes lay alongside crisp new green ones; the fivers were in a separate pile; silver and copper coins were bundled in small bags. "It's the takings." Mother clicked the drawer shut.

"The takings?"

"Yes, I thought it would be much nicer if the guests paid daily."

"But all that money! How—how much are you charging?"

"Three guineas," said Mother, not looking at Father.

He was shocked. For the first time in his life he was rendered speechless. He gazed round the kitchen as if it was of absorbing interest. "Er, how much money is there?"

"Almost two hundred pounds, Henry—darling." Mother's face shed a bright radiance. "I sold a few little souvenirs, too."

"My picture?" Father was suddenly infected by her sparkling enthusiasm and eagerly leaned forward. "How much did it bring?"

"Sixteen guineas," she announced triumphantly.

I was forgotten in the excited chatter that rattled backwards and forwards over the table. The money was carefully taken out and counted, and then lowered into a cache under the floorboards. Father slept over the spot.

We moved into halcyon days. The atmosphere was peaceful and contented and our guests put on weight under the benign influence of Mother's cooking. Business thrived . . . And then it happened—so suddenly that it struck us like a bomb.

A car arrived from London and a whispered message was passed to the searchers. Inside an hour they were hurrying to their different houses and had packed. Others soon followed as the whisper spread.

A bigger and better and brighter rocket had now been perfected. It had blazed its way successfully into space. Ours was

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obsolete. The offer of the reward had been withdrawn. Mother collapsed when she heard the news.

It was Father who brought her back to normal by gently pointing to the cache under the floor.

Later, Mother became quite philosophical to me. She remarked, "After all, we still have the gold—and one must make hay while the sun shines." She sighed. "But I'm afraid it's true you can't have your cake and eat it—I wonder if we could melt the cake, the rocket, I mean, into something saleable?"

One thing puzzled me about the rocket. Why didn't it scream its way down out of the sky and land with an earthshaking roar? Why didn't it sizzle its way through the atmosphere and land white-hot? It is still resting so amiably on the lawn.

I think I have the answer. I've just dragged away the hay, and I see that a crimson tentacle has sprouted from the hull.

Here comes that pet of mine! Won't Mother be surprised. And Father, too!

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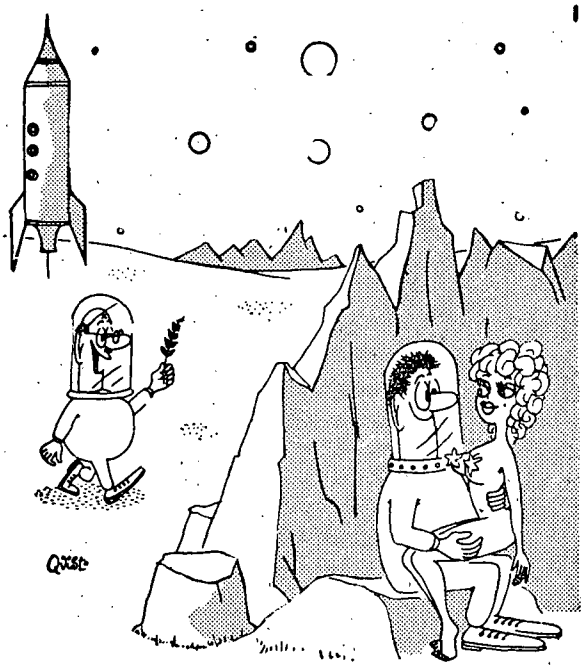

"Look, Thompson; I've found life on this planet!"

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LOVE MATCH

Usually weddings in our valley are great events

BY BRIAN CLEEVE

HE WAS a big shambling boy of a man that no one in the valley ever took much notice of, for good or bad. Blue eyes, under lint-pale eyebrows, that never seemed to be looking quite at what anyone else was looking at. A soft, straggling fringe of beard on his chin that somehow made him seem more of a child than if he'd shaved it off. And a mouth as gentle as that of a woman in love. Yet it was hard to think of Bruno Holtzmann ever being in love. He seemed too far away.

Hans Trott, the schoolmaster, said that if he'd only applied his mind to things, he'd have been as clever as any boy he ever had through his hands. He was not slow witted, but just far away.

You'd see him sometimes sitting on a fallen log at the edge of the forest, thick shoulders stooping, huge hands hanging between his knees, blue eyes gazing at nothing. At the moss under a tree, maybe, or a line of ants climbing the bark. Nothing at all. And if you asked him what he was doing he'd smile and say, " Just looking."

Or else he'd be carving things with a knife. He could carve quite well, too; and the schoolmaster tried to help him, showing him how to make bottle-corks with funny heads to sell to the summer visitors.

But he'd never do what Hans Trott showed him. Only foolish things out of his own head or that he'd seen in the woods. Things that no one would ever buy. And so even Hans left him alone after a while, and we never thought about him in connection with the real life of the village.

He drifted through his schooldays and out of them, as aimless as a cloud in the summer sky, hardly seeming to realise that he'd become a man. He did what his mother told him about their small bit of a farm, his father being dead, God rest him. He'd chop wood for her, or dig, or draw water, or hoe the lines of vegetables behind the cottage, but never as if his heart was in it—only out of obedience and gentleness towards his mother; and as likely as not he'd forget what he was doing halfway through

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a task and stand stock still, leaning on his hoe or the helve of his axe, staring at the sky or the mountains, or a bird pecking on the ground.

Often enough, as I'd pass by the door with the postbag, his mother would come out to me and say that she didn't know what would become of him when she was gone. And although I never said so to her, I didn't know either. The patch of land they had wouldn't keep a man long the way he worked on it.

And then, almost between one day and the next it seemed, it came so suddenly, Brunnhild Winterhalder married him.

It was as if the valley had been struck by thunder. Brunnhild Winterhalder! Old Gustav's only daughter. It couldn't be believed.

The Winterhalders were like royalty. Half the valley belonged to them. And Brunnhild walked through it like a crown princess. Tall and slender and full of pride, like steel mixed with gold. The other girls played in the meadows with the boys in summer, fought with snowballs in the winter, stole kisses in the cowsheds, blushed and giggled if a man spoke to them. But from the time she could walk Brunnhild Winterhalder was different, as if she knew even then that life would belong to her.

And almost from that time it had been the common word that when she was grown she'd marry her second cousin, Konrad Goltz, whose father owned a bank in Neuburg. Every summer and Christmas the Goltzes came to spend a holiday with the Winterhalders, and often Konrad would stay on afterwards for as long as school would let him, until I suppose he was as much like a brother to Brunnhild as a cousin.

And maybe that was the trouble. Because, as a man, you couldn't compare him to Bruno Holtzmann. Compare him? As well compare a racehorse to a donkey dreaming over a clump of thistles. He was tall and dark and wide in the shoulder, striding down the village street like the soldier he was, and with a way of smiling that set the girls following him with their eyes like sheep after a piper.

And yet, one summer when Konrad was away with his regiment, Brunnhild announced that she was marrying Bruno. That Sunday, Father Bauer read out the banns as if he was reading a death sentence. I remember it like a painting. The church very small and still, the sunlight falling in white blades of light across the dark clothes of the congregation, and the wooden statues half lost in the shadows round the walls. And Father Bauer in his white surplice leaning against the yellow, wooden rail of the pulpit, the paper trembling in his hand.

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"Bruno Holtzmann and Brunnhild Winterhalder, both of this parish, declare their intention of joining in holy matrimony on the third Sunday from this day. If any man or woman . . ." his voice faltered on in a silence, as if the kind, small congregation had been struck to stone. Then the drawing of breath and the gasp of whispering.

You can guess well enough what followed. The arguments and the pleadings and the threatenings. But they were of age; and where Brunnhild stood like a rock, like steel, against every word that was said to her, Bruno was like water, slipping between their fingers when they tried to fasten him with arguments. He'd smile and lower his eyes, his great hands folded on his axe or hanging between his knees, and say only, "I love her."

It was like blasphemy to hear it. How? Why? When had they become close enough even to think of such things? Never, that we could see.

Certainly Brunnhild had talked to him at times, looked over his shoulder at his whittling, been kind to him. But so had everyone. He had hardly seemed to notice her. Once or twice, indeed, he had given her his carvings. But then, he would give them to anyone who was kind enough to take them. Usually people just threw them away when they were out of his sight again. And anyway, love doesn't spring from a foolish gift. How? Why?

But all Brunnhild would say was, "I have chosen him," her chin lifted as if the people talking to her were rebellious subjects instead of her elders trying to persuade her for her own good.

But I can tell you, I wasn't one of them. I've enough business of my own to mind, delivering the letters round the valley and keeping the village post office in order. On foot in summer, skis in winter. And day in, day out, the stamps to count and the telephone to mind, with only my sister Sarah to help me. I've small enough time to worry about headstrong, wilful girls. I wouldn't even have seen the wedding if I hadn't had letters to deliver to Father Bauer that day.

Usually weddings in our valley are great events.

For weeks the women are in and out of the girl's house, helping with her dress and her trousseau, gossiping and crying over her. And the week of the wedding, you'd hardly see the church for flowers and green branches.

Then, on the day itself, there isn't an inch of space on the benches; the village children are scrubbed and starched and lined up at the church door with their hymn books. Hans Trott is at the organ with tears running down his long nose from behind

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his spectacles, with his grey hair on end like a bird's nest; and finally the bride comes like a queen in glory. We keep up the old ways, and she wears the crown of virtue: a thin golden circlet so old that no one remembers when it was made. And for that day she is a queen, and her man a king.

I've heard the priest say that every husband is the king of his own house, and every wife the queen. But in the greyness of the days their royalty becomes forgotten. It's only on their wedding day that one sees them as they truly are.

If that is so, there was small royalty for Brunnhild. Barely a woman of the village, but her father's servants and her own mother, went near her in the weeks before, except to scold her. Father Bauer even wanted to keep the crown from her, and hold the marriage almost secretly. But she set her mouth at that.

Maria, the priest's servant, told me how she downfaced him, he so old and gentle and so bewildered at the wrongness of the marriage, and she so young and strong. She's taller than the priest, and her eyes are blue-grey like the winter sky.

" I will wear the crown," she said. " And we will be married at mid morning on Sunday." She meant, So that everyone may watch, who cares to watch.

She had her way, for whatever good it did her. I don't think there were a dozen in the church. Her mother, looking as if it was a funeral. And her father, old Gustav, with his grey beard like an iron ploughshare, and his hard pale eyes. I think he'd have stayed away, only he wouldn't please the village by showing how deeply he'd been hurt. He sat in the front row like a statue carved out of oak, his arms folded and his beard sunk on his chest.

And, of course, there was Bruno's mother, frightened out of her wits, bobbing a curtsy to old Gustav whenever she caught his eye, which wasn't often, and crying into a handkerchief.

Then there were a few house servants of the Winterhalders, and one or two of the people who'll stare at anything, if it's free.

Myself, I was only there because of a letter I had for Father Bauer, as I've said.

There was no choir of children; and Hans Trott had refused to play the organ, so Maria, the priest's servant, played it. It sounded like geese being killed.

And into the near-empty church came Bruno, looking like a dancing bear in his best suit. It was too small for him, and the black cloth stretched over his chest and shoulders until you'd think the buttons would burst, while his huge hands and wrists stuck out of the narrow sleeves like tree branches. He smiled at everyone, as if he was not quite sure why he or they were there,

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and sat down behind old Gustav, hanging his hands between his knees the way he did when he was sitting on a tree stump by the forest.

Then came a wailing squeal on the organ from Maria, and the bride was there in the church door. And suddenly I realised that old Gustav shouldn't have been in the church at all as yet. He should have been with his daughter, ready to give her away. But he sat like a rock, and the few of us on the benches craned round to see who was with her.

It was her uncle Kurt, a poor creature who had been wounded in the war and could barely drag himself about. Old Gustav kept him out of charity. And now, apparently, he had chosen him to give Brunnhild away because he couldn't bring himself to do it.

And so, with the organ wailing and Bruno shambling to his feet to wait for her, Brunnhild came up the aisle on her uncle's one arm, his left leg dragging and shuffling along the floor. It looked as if she was supporting him rather than he supporting her. She was wearing the crown, but I think it must have burnt her forehead with shame. Yet she never flushed, never faltered. She walked as if the man she had chosen was a king, and there were drawn swords round her.

I thought the priest would choke before he got through the ceremony. "Do you, Bruno, take this woman . . .?" I was watching old Gustav's face, and word by word the colour drained out of it till it was like lichened stone.

And when Brunnhild said, "I will," her mother sobbed and buried her face in old Gustav's shoulder.

But somehow the thing was done, and by that night Brunnhild was in her new husband's cottage, whose small narrow windows look down the valley at her father's great red-roofed farmhouse, with its timber stacks and spreading fields.

And still no one in the valley knew why. We only began to guess a few months later, when her cousin, Konrad Goltz, arrived on leave from his regiment.

In the meantime, I won't say we'd got used to the matter, but the first sharp edge had worn off. Everyone recognised that it was done, couldn't be undone, and had to be accepted, although that didn't mean it had to be approved.

Somehow, I don't quite know how, we felt that Brunnhild had struck a blow at all of us. She had upset the order of things. Where once she had had the respect and admiration of everyone, she now had something that was near to hatred. And her poor shambling husband shared in it.

Nobody gave them more than the curtest of good days when

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they saw them about the valley. No one called on them. No one invited them.

Within a month you could see it telling in Brunnhild's face. Before the marriage the sheer bravado of what she was doing had carried her along. The dreadfulness of her choice had seemed to give it a kind of perverse splendour. It was like suicide, and people had looked at her as you'd look at a man poised on a cliff's edge threatening to jump.

You'd go on your knees to him to stop him jumping, the way most of us had gone on our mental knees to her. But let him jump, and he's nothing but a shameful body of flesh, to be buried out of sight and mind in unhallowed ground.

And Brunnhild had jumped. In these few months she found the difference between threatening and doing.

Her face grew very pale and drawn, and her mouth hard as a steel trap. Everything must have rasped on her like gravel on bare skin. The coarseness of the food, the manners of her mother-in-law that were those of a frightened servant, the narrowness and poverty of the cottage with its three box-like rooms, she who had grown up in rooms bigger than the church.

And, above all, her husband must have torn her nerves in shreds, because he didn't treat her like a husband at all. Never gave her a task to do. Never gave her the feeling that someone stronger than herself had taken her destiny into his hands.

How could he, poor fool? He treated her like some injured, helpless bird that he might have found in the woods, carrying it in his great hands, and making a nest for it in an old shoe, to sit and stare at the softness of its feathers and the brightness of its eye for hour after hour.

And as for her mother-in-law giving her work to do, or a sense of belonging to the house, she could scarcely bring herself to speak to Brunnhild without curtsying.

Brunnhild took to wandering in the woods or up the mountains, going away all day with a knapsack of food and a stick, and coming back at dusk. I'd meet her sometimes on my rounds, striding with blind eyes like a lost valkyrie, as if only by wearing herself out could she hope to stay sane.

The snow came, and she'd go ski-ing. But always by herself.

And Bruno would drift through his strange, faraway days, not much differently from the way he had always done. Except that now he worked harder. A wood stack grew slowly behind the cottage, and with the spring and the melting of the snow he began to plant herbs and vegetables, and even flowers, and strangely enough he did it as neatly as anyone could have done, touching the plants with his fingers as if they were alive.

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And then in the first days of summer Konrad came. In a motor car. He stopped first at the Winterhalders' farm, and for an hour he was with old Gustav in his study. One of the servants told me you could hear him all over the house before the end.

"How could you let her do it?" he shouted again and again.

And the old man's voice, between sorrow and fury, answered, "Why didn't you come before it was too late?"

At the end of the hour he stormed out of the house and into his car, and slammed it up the track towards the head of the valley. But halfway there it stuck in the mud, and he had to get out and trudge up to the cottage on foot.

Bruno was in the kitchen garden when he came—I can tell you there were more than one or two people who followed Konrad to see what would happen, and I've had every word of it from three or four of them—and for once Brunnhild was in the cottage doing something. Mending a dress or some such, since her father had refused to give her a pfennig of cash or a length of cloth beyond what she carried with her on her wedding night.

Bruno straightened himself up, or as much as he ever did, and smiled at Konrad as though there was nothing between them in the world.

Konrad stood for a second in front of him, quivering. I don't know what he had meant to do in coming; but, whatever it was, I think he forgot it in the wave of anger he felt at seeing Bruno in the flesh, seeing the creature that had dared to marry Brunnhild. And, looking at the two of them together, you'd understand his anger. They were like two races of men.

Of men? Of man and beast, almost. Konrad, slim and swift and handsome, with his hooked, arrogant nose and hard soldier's eyes. And Bruno, heavy as a log, his little golden fringe of beard like untidy yellow wool, and his mild eyes gazing at everything as if they saw what wasn't there. His hands were dark with earth from planting, and he tried to brush them on the thighs of his trousers.

"You swine," said Konrad. "You bestial imbecile." And he struck Bruno full in the mouth with his closed fist. Bruno stared at him in bewilderment, not even lifting his hand to defend himself or to wipe away the blood running from the corner of his lips.

"I should kill you," said Konrad, drawing back his fist again; and with that Brunnhild came out of the cottage in a white blaze of fury.

"We'll see who'll kill," she raged. "Hit him!" she said to Bruno. And when Bruno didn't move, she beat her fists against his shoulder. "Kill him!" screamed Brunnhild. "Kill him.

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" Don't just stand there, you shameful lout. Strike him back."

For answer Bruno bent down and took up his spade, turning it in his gigantic hands as if it was a trowel; and the people there gasped and half turned to run, thinking that he was going to split Konrad's skull with it. Even Konrad flinched, they say, as if he suddenly realised the size of the man he had struck.

But Bruno only set the blade of the spade in the earth and pressed it down. " The poor man is in great sorrow for you," he said to Brunnhild. " He did not mean what he did."

" Is that all your answer? " Brunnhild whispered.

Bruno just smiled at her, and began to dig.

For a long moment Konrad and Brunnhild stood there, as if they didn't know what to do. Then Brunnhild spun on her heel and fled inside, pressing her knuckles against her mouth.

Konrad hesitated, made to follow her, and stopped again; then he, too, veered round and ran down the hill to his car.

In the days that followed we found out something of what lay behind it all. Gossip here, a word overheard there.

It was nothing very much out of the way. Just a quarrel, really. Hardly even a lover's quarrel because, as I've said, Brunnhild and Konrad had grown up too close together to have that lovers' suddenness between them. But what they lacked in one passion they made up for in another: pride. A small quarrel had become a fierce one.

He had gone to rejoin his regiment swearing that he wouldn't come back till she sent for him on her knees, and she had sworn that unless he came back on his own knees within three months she'd marry the village idiot before she'd marry him. And he hadn't come, and she'd kept her word. Or as close as it could be kept, lacking an actual idiot to marry.

It was a pathetic enough story. Almost like a fairy tale. The prince and the princess betrayed by pride, and the princess fallen into the hands of a hideous monster.

Perhaps that last isn't quite an accurate description of poor Bruno, but it's the way the village began to think of him. With one of those sudden swings of opinion, everyone began to blame Bruno for the whole thing.

And when Konrad didn't leave, but stayed on with the Winterhalders, there weren't too many words said against it. Heads began to nod and tongues to whisper. Konrad had been seen up at the cottage when Bruno was away over in the next valley buying some seed. Brunnhild and Konrad had been seen together climbing up the Altenberg.

And although a few said no good could come of it, others said

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that times had changed, and that in the cities and among rich people these things were done every day and thought nothing of; that it was no marriage at all between Brunnhild and Bruno, only a shameful farce; and that Father Bauer would never have allowed it if he hadn't been so old. Day by day we expected something to happen, although I don't know what.

But, thinking of it now, what did happen was stranger than the strangest thing that any of us expected.

I was delivering a letter to the herdsmen in the summer pastures, high up beyond the face of the Altenberg that falls like a great thousand-foot curtain of stone between our valley and the small summer Alps. It isn't a difficult path if you're used to it.

In a few places the path becomes a ledge not much wider than your bootsole, with the Alten river in its gorge like a ribbon of white lace eight hundred feet below. But beyond that the cliff slopes back, and gradually becomes the summer pastures. The cattle come up by another longer route, of course, but a man on foot should have no trouble crossing the cliff face if he's a mountaineer, unless there's a wind.

But this day the wind was screaming off the cliff like an eagle, trying to tear me off my feet. I can tell you I wasn't thinking of much except getting home as I came along the ledge. Brunnhild, Bruno, Konrad: they were a thousand miles from my mind. So far from it that, once I was on the broad track leading down through the forest, I almost passed two climbers without realising who they were. Brunnhild and Konrad Goltz together.

Konrad bent down to re-tie his bootlace as if he was hiding his face, but Brunnhild went by with her head lifted and her eyes like iron, and the thought came to me that maybe they'd been quarrelling again.

"I should be careful up there," I said. "The wind is bad." But they never answered me.

Half an hour later I was passing Bruno's cottage. He was digging in the garden, and really it was a wonder to see. The little plants green and trim as dancers in their rows. And he had a beehive now, painted white, with the bees humming and crawling like golden pollen on its wooden step. I gave him "Grüss Gott," and was going on, because what I had seen above made me feel almost guilty towards him, when suddenly he called to me.

"Walther," he called, "will you come into the cottage and sit down?" He leaned his spade against the fence. Wondering what on earth he wanted, although something in me guessed at part of it, I hung my satchel on the gate and followed him in. I had never delivered a letter to Bruno or his mother in all

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my years as village postman, and had never seen the inside of their house. It was very strange. Small and full of shadows, and yet also curiously light as if the shadows themselves were luminous. There was a smell of herbs and scrubbed wood, and everywhere there were the things that Bruno had whittled out of old pieces of timber. A table with field mice on its legs as if they were running up an ear of corn; a squirrel clinging to the branch it had been carved from. And, lying on the table, a wooden head. Even from the doorway I could see that it was meant to be Brunnhild's head.

"What do you want from me, Bruno?" I said rather roughly.

"Good advice," he answered me, smiling and looking out of the window as if he was thinking of what he saw there rather than of me. "You have always been good to me," he said. "You will tell me what is best for me to do."

And suddenly I felt ashamed, and wanted to run out of the small house and down the hill and never see Bruno Holtzmann again. But I couldn't run. He had picked up the wooden head now and was looking down at it. Not a big thing. Quite small, and seeming smaller still, cradled in his hands.

"They say they want to go away together," he said softly. "And that if I say certain things the marriage we have had can be undone, as if it never was. But those things would not be true. What shall I do, Walther?"

I swallowed and tried to think. "Why did she marry you, Bruno? And why did you marry her?"

"She says now because she was mad. But then . . ." He smiled again, and I realised in that moment how much sadness there had always been in Bruno's smile. "But then . . . then she said differently. That it was because she saw something deep down inside me—the kind of thing I see in the woods and the sky. Depth on depth of things that you can't put into words. Only a little of it into carving." And he fondled the wood in his hands as if it was alive.

"And why did you marry her?"

"Because I, too, saw things in her . . ." His voice trailed away in that disconcerting fashion he had that made people call him simple, and he stayed silent, looking out of the window, his fingers folded over the small head.

And suddenly there was the sound of running feet outside, and Brunnhild was there, her long fair hair broken loose from its braids and streaming like a golden cataract on the white shoulders of her thick wool jersey, her face flushed with running and with something else—anger? shame?—I couldn't tell.

"Come," she said, "come," seizing Bruno by the arm, dragging

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him out of the cottage. I followed, and we all went running up the path through the forest towards the cliff, Brunnhild running ahead and then back again to Bruno, tugging and worrying at him and every now and then flinging a word of explanation over her shoulder.

" Konrad . . . he's on the ledge . . . the wind . . . afraid to move." And the fury in her voice as she said " afraid " was like a whip hissing through the air, searching for bare flesh to strike. Down here the wind was doing no more than ruffle our hair and cool our foreheads. But once we were above the trees it beat against us like soft clubs.

And when we reached the ledge, I saw that the wind had almost doubled its strength in the last hour. It shrieked down the naked rock gorge like a maniac, tearing flakes off the face of the cliff, tossing and thrashing at the heads of the forest far below, stopping the words in our throats and pulling us towards the nothingness of the gorge.

I drew back, not even daring to look down.

" There," said Brunnhild, pointing.

I looked and saw Konrad a hundred yards farther on, face flat to the cliff, arms spread, the wind now plastering him against the rock, now pulling him out from it.

He was just beyond the narrowest part of the ledge, and beyond him again the ledge narrowed once more to a few inches wide. And he was afraid, being city bred, either to go forward or come back.

Glancing down for a second I could hardly blame him. With the wind that strength I wouldn't have tried the ledge myself.

Brunnhild had gripped her husband by the sleeves, and was staring into his face. " Will you fetch him back for me? " she screamed. Only a scream could be heard against that wind.

Very slowly, Bruno nodded.

He bent down to tighten his bootlaces and then his belt so that nothing should catch against the rock and, without a word or even a look at either of us, began very slowly to walk along the ledge. Walk, for a little way. Then turn with his back to the cliff and shuffle. Then inch his way, fraction by fraction, as the ledge grew narrower and narrower, while the wind screamed and tore at his shoulders and blew the lambswool fluff of his beard about his chin. Until he was close enough to Konrad to touch his shoulder.

Brunnhild and I had drawn back and down the path a little.

" If I was Bruno, I would kill him," said Brunnhild savagely. " How easy it would be."

And as Konrad turned his head, and saw who was touching

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him, you could tell that the same thought came to him. Even a hundred yards away you could tell it. The sudden shiver and start of a new terror. I thought he'd fling himself down. But Bruno was already holding him, trying to draw him back towards us. And Konrad clung to the face of the rock like a child, screaming, out of his wits with terror.

"Oh God, oh God," said Brunnhild, and her fingers sank into my arms like steel hooks.

I thought she was afraid for Konrad until I looked sideways at her face and saw the shame there, as if she was being whipped. To have had Konrad despise her husband had been bad enough. But to have her husband despise Konrad, and to know that he would have the right—it was like wormwood on her heart. If ever a proud woman brought shame on her own head through pride, it was Brunnhild. But in those minutes I had no time for thinking. Only watching.

For half a minute, maybe, Bruno tried to persuade Konrad to come with him.

And then, realising that it was useless, he did a thing that gives me nightmares to this day, whenever I think of it. He pulled Konrad bodily off his feet and swung him into his arms like a child. With ten inches of stone to stand on, a sheer cliff at his back, and eight hundred feet of emptiness below.

The heart turned over in me to see it, and I wanted to shut my eyes. But I couldn't. I think I forgot to breathe. Then the deathly slowness of working his way back to us. One leg sideways. The other drawn up to it. The first leg sideways again. Foot by foot along the ledge, with Konrad in his arms held over the gorge, and the wind slamming against them like a giant door.

"Oh, Mother of God," whispered Brunnhild, and this time her voice was quite different. The shame was still there, but another kind of shame . . . until the worst part was over. But still Bruno carried Konrad. He came up to us where we were sheltering behind a low rock. He bent down and laid Konrad at Brunnhild's feet, and I saw that Konrad had fainted away like a girl.

"There is your Konrad," Bruno said to her. "I will go back to the house now." And he walked away down the slope of the mountain towards the edge of the forest without another word.

For a long, long moment Brunnhild stared after him with a most strange expression in her eyes. Then she turned her face to the rock and began to cry. I left her there, and followed Bruno down. But I took care not to catch up with him.

That was the last I saw of Konrad. The next day he and his motor car were gone, and none of us have seen him again. There were half a dozen wild stories about why he had gone but, except

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for Bruno and myself and Brunnhild, no one knew the truth of what had happened, and we kept silence; although sometimes when I'd hear the women gossiping and speculating in the post office, it tore my heart not to tell them what I knew.

But that day had given me a new feeling for Brunnhild and her strange, strange man, and I held my tongue, because I knew that they wanted me to. And the secret has made a bond between us.

Now, whenever my round takes me past their cottage, I go in; these days Brunnhild is always there, tending the things a wife should, or doing something for their son who will one day be as tall and fair and big as his quiet father. She has peace in her eyes.

Her mother-in-law is not so afraid of her now, although still she treats her with great deference, and so does Bruno. And so indeed do I.

But then, she in turn treats Bruno as if he was a king. And sometimes, when she puts her hand on his arm and smiles at him, I think of what Father Bauer used to preach: that in his own house each man of us is a king, and that for every one of us there comes a day of royalty.

He meant the marriage day, of course. And perhaps he is still right, even for Bruno Holtzmann and his wife. I think that day on the ledge was their true marriage day.

And, curiously enough, when I looked again at the carving Bruno made of his wife's head, I saw that he had given her a crown—the same thin crown she had worn so sadly as a bride.

But in the carved face there is no sadness. Instead, there seems depth on depth of understanding in it; and turning to Brunnhild's face from the carving I can see the same understanding there.

Was it always there? Waiting for Bruno to discover it? Or did he put it there, with the same quiet fingers that carve wood and grow flowers as no one else in the valley can?

Can a man have that gift of magic in his hands? I don't know. But men have started to come to Bruno for his carvings, and I saw one of them empty his wallet on the table, trying to buy that head.

Bruno only smiled at him, and pushed the notes away.

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LIFE ASSURANCE?

They gave each other a smile with a future in it.

RING LARDNER

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Night Beauties

Lay your sleeping head, my love
Human on my faithless arm . . .

W. H. AUDEN, *Lullaby*

Playback

Thirty years ago lying awake,
Lying awake
In London at night when childhood barred me
From livelier pastimes, I'd hear a street-band break
Into old favourites—" The Ash Grove," " Killarney,"
Or " Angels Guard Thee " . . .

I could have lain for hours together,
Sweet hours together,
Listening to the cornet's cry
Down wet streets gleaming like patent leather
Where beauties jaunted in cabs to their revelry,
Jewelled and spry . . .

C. DAY LEWIS, *Cornet Solo*

Night Rendezvouses

Among the guide-books written by Siamese journalists in English there is one which specialises in Bangkok's night life. It is called *Black Shadow, The Book for Men Only*, and it costs five ticals. The very name of the local currency is, to the hearty Englishman, one of the best jokes in the country: a hundred stangs one tical, and, as I added in a weak moment, no doubt a hundred ticals one slap.

The author of *Black Shadow*, who hides coyly behind the pseudonym of Dream Lover, gets straight to the purpose of the guide in a preliminary note.

" This book is somewhat inevitable to be kept ready at hands . . .

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Now, my dear travellers, the time is reached to the aim of this book to guide you to roam the places of sweet romance—of night rendezvouses—the rooms of these young showy Nightingales. Every one keeps waiting and is ready, however, to be the best of your night companion—to accompany and guide you into and through the land of Aden—the place of bliss."

No doubt it would surprise the inhabitants of Aden to hear their sun-scorched hell described thus. But D. L. does not pause to explain: he is too much concerned in praising the merits of the Young Showy Nightingales.

" By her your dream will become true. With sweet hours of her accompaniment it will certainly be of the best to your disquieting sexuality. To men, the women are sweet paradise. Nothing in this earth as can be said as great as that of the feminine, so do we all men reach to this light."

You had better read that last sentence to yourself, quietly, half a dozen times.

MICHAEL BARSLEY, *Behind the Screen*

O Golden Fleece she is where she lies tonight
Trammelled in her sheets like midsummer on a bed,
Kisses like moths flitter over her bright
Mouth, and, as she turns her head,
I feel all space move close to give her right.

GEORGE BARKER, *O Golden Fleece She Is*

Refreshing

On the night before the conflict, Cuchulain also was preparing himself for what lay before him on the morrow.

Laeg, his charioteer, came to him and said, " How, my master, will you spend this night? " " I had not thought," said Cuchulain, " of spending it in any other way than other nights? "

" Glad should I be if you would return to your wife, to Emer of the beautiful hair, where she is waiting you at Slieve Fuad."

So that night Cuchulain went home to Emer, and gentle and loving was she to him after their separation from each other; and very early in the morning he returned refreshed and comforted.

ELEANOR HULL, *Cuchulain, The Hound of Ulster*

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Dates in Argosy

And still she slept an azure-lidded sleep,
In blanched linen, smooth, and lavendered;
While he from forth the closet brought a heap
Of candied apple, quince, and plum, and gourd;
With jellies soother than the creamy curd,
And lucent syrops, tinct with cinnamon;
Manna and dates, in argosy transferred . . .
" And now, my love, my seraph fair, awake!
Thou art mine heaven, and I thine eremite:
Open thine eyes, for meek St. Agnes' sake,
Or I shall drowse beside thee, so my soul doth ache."

JOHN KEATS, *The Eve of St. Agnes*

Roses and Wine

I rose and went to my bedroom . . . and inside, I found a feast waiting for me. My bedside table was covered with little dishes of tasty food saved from supper and generous cups of wine . . . By the time that I was in bed, Fotis, who had succeeded in getting her mistress off to sleep quickly, appeared in the doorway with a bunch of roses. A rose in full bloom was tucked between her breasts. She glided towards me, kissed me firmly, wove some of the roses into a garland for my head and sprinkled the bed with the petals of the rest.

She pulled off every stitch of clothing, untied her hair and tossed it into happy disorder with a shake of her head. There she stood, transformed into a living statue: the Love-goddess rising from the sea.

LUCIUS APULEIUS, *The Golden Ass, translated by Robert Graves*

Awakening

Waking with morning, I note the empty
Sea. No sail ventures on
That calm. And there she stands against
The sun, brushing her golden hair . . .
Here by the window her light taunts
That old lover the Sun. Sun,
Do not deny her goldenness, for in
The night (though she burn), she
Is all of darkness in the dark.

THOMAS COLE, *The Landscape of Love*

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ELEPHANT'S EAR

BY JOAN AIKEN

"THE fleas," said Miss Printer, "are not so bad here as they were at Sreb."

"Maybe not," said Mr. Humphreys, "but they are a lot worse than they were at Prijepolje. Have you finished buying wine?"

"I have plenty of slivovitch and riesling. But I'd like a few dozen more proseks, and some retsina if we go home through Greece. How are you getting on?"

"I've bought a lot of hors-d'œuvres and twenty tapestries."

"We could do with some silver jewellery."

"We shall never be home by Christmas at this rate," grumbled Mr. Humphreys, a thin, dark, and irascible young man.

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Miss Printer raised her fine brows and gazed at him reproachfully with enormous grey eyes, clear as November lochs. They were her best feature. She had passed her first youth, though she was still in her second; indeed there was a quality about the famous London store of Rampadges which seemed to preserve its employees, flavour and body, like the best ginger. Miss Printer had been with the firm no more than twenty years, since she was seventeen, but already, thin, smooth-skinned, pale-haired, she was touched with agelessness.

"Haven't you any loyalty to the firm?" she suggested.

When they set sail together on their buying excursion she had been on the verge of falling in love with Mr. Humphreys. Now she was over the brink, helpless and hopeless, and finding it an uphill emotion in the face of their differences.

"Surely we've bought enough for the Christmas market?"

"Enough staples," she said, considering their list. "French plums, Swiss cuckoo clocks, German toys, Czech embroidery. Not enough novelties. I'd like to go down to Galicnik and buy some stonework."

"*Stonework?*"

"People like it for ornamental gardens. And I do wish we could get hold of an elephant or a kangaroo."

Mr. Humphreys had exhausted his capacity for expressing surprise. He just gaped at her and said at length rather feebly, "Surely it's not very probable in the Balkans?"

"Not *very*, but it's possible," said Miss Printer. "I have done so before. There are many travelling menageries in these parts. And since we are limited to Europe, the Balkans are our best bet."

"Why do you want elephants and kangaroos?"

"In Mr. Tybalt's days they always had an elephant at Rampadges for Christmas," she said wistfully. "Or a camel or a zebra."

"He's dead now."

"I know." No need to say more. Mr. Tybalt had been the nephew of the original Rampadge who started the magnificent store, and his ideas had been as lavish and imperial as those of his Victorian forebear.

The two travellers got back into their car, having finished their frugal picnic of prsut, borak, ratluk lokum, and Cvicek drunk from plastic beakers—although she was a discerning and intrepid buyer, Miss Printer did not believe in wasting the firm's money—and continued on their way, Mr. Humphreys driving.

They were bound for a small Montenegrin town called Grksik, where Miss Printer hoped to buy some pairs of the famous

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local slippers embroidered with gold thread and heavily jewelled, which should sell like hot cakes at Christmas.

The bleak wild Balkan scenery rose about them in tarnished autumnal colours. It made Mr. Humphreys shiver, but Miss Printer surveyed it affectionately.

"I had such a nice picnic here in 1947," she said. Her tone of comfortable reminiscence somehow annoyed Mr. Humphreys and he trod incautiously on the accelerator. Their powerful hired car zipped round a sharp turn in the road, and became disastrously entangled with the rear section of a procession which had been concealed from them by a spur of the mountain.

"Zalvaro!"

"Molim, molim!"

"Oh dear."

"Au secours!"

"Oimoi!" Shouts, bellows, brays, and polyglot exclamations volleyed from the ramshackle cornice of men, animals, and rudimentary vehicles which had toppled backwards over the bonnet of their car.

"Oh dear," said Miss Printer again, "you seem to have bumped into a circus."

By now it was nearly dark.

Miss Printer knew that in some European countries the adjective *Balkan* is used to describe something uncouth, wild, savage. *Balkan*, she thought to herself with satisfaction, gazing at the crazy torchlit mass that seethed over and round the front portion of their sedate car. Goats formed a kind of fringe to it; there were bearded, tarbushed men with staves, like Old Testament illustrations; two apes, apparently chained together; and a zebra, neat and dainty as a fairytale convict. The whole scene gave Miss Printer a deep and inexplicable pleasure.

Mr. Humphreys was standing commandingly in the midst of it all trying to make some sense out of the business. Her heart ached with love at the sight of him. He was so tall and well-cut and impeccable, his head was such a good shape, the curl on the bowler that he wore even in the Balkans was exactly right. He looked what he was, a young English businessman who would make good.

The best of his kind in the world, thought Miss Printer sorrowfully. If he had been an article for sale in the market she would have bought him unhesitatingly for Rampadges, whatever his price. But he belonged to Rampadges already, and whatever his price, he was not for her; she knew that she filled him with alarm and a vague resentment.

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He came angrily back to the car. "I can't get what they are saying," he said. "Can you make head or tail of it?"

Miss Printer uncoiled her slender length from the other front seat. She had fluent French, German, Italian, Turkish, and a smattering of Greek, Russian, and Spanish, but none of these proved effective in the present case, so she fell back on the Serbo-Croat phrase book.

"Molim rezervirati jednu sobu sa dva kreveta i kupatilom, Please reserve one double room with a bathroom," hardly seemed to meet the situation, but she tried, "Dobro vece, Good evening. Ne razumem, I do not understand. Zao mi je, I am sorry," and followed it up with, "Mogu li imati racun, molim? Can I have the bill, please?"

This produced a hush. The chorus sorted themselves out, and the goats were dragged offstage. A small boy led the zebra away into the dark, while the monkeys were tidied back into a sort of wicker perambulator.

"Racun," she repeated hopefully.

An enormous smiling man with moustaches like brackets shouldered his way into the flaring light and burst into a torrent of explanation which Mr. Humphreys heard in bewildered non-comprehension.

Miss Printer listened, nodding. A boy squatting beside them held a torch, so that she looked like a small cream-coloured witch interviewing an affable devil. At length the man bowed, bringing down his arms in a sweeping gesture of acceptance. Some money changed hands.

The procession disentangled itself with almost magical speed and whirled off into the darkness.

"Well! You settled that very easily," said Mr. Humphreys with unwilling respect. "How much did you have to give him?"

"Oh, only about four and six." Miss Printer spoke absently. She was straining her eyes, searching for something in the engulfing dark. "There was a condition attached, you see. We have injured one of the men, and the condition was that we take him and his animal to the nearest monastery."

"Injured a man?" said Mr. Humphreys, aghast.

"He fainted from fright, so far as I could gather."

"And they just went off like that and left him? Where is he?"

"Somewhere around. The ringmaster, or whatever he was, said this man, Iskandar, was a weakling. He seemed rather glad to be rid of him. Yes, there he is." Her eye had caught a gleam of white and she moved away. When Mr. Humphreys caught up with her she was kneeling by the side of what at first appeared to be a bundle of rags.

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" He's still in a faint," she said, " we'd better get him into the back of the car before he comes to."

" Most extraordinary," Mr. Humphreys muttered, helping her lift the little man, who was piteously thin and light, no more than skin and bone. " What language were you talking to the ringmaster? "

" Turkish. But I think he said this man was a Russian."

Iskandar came to as they put him in and uttered a loud groan. At the same moment Mr. Humphreys felt himself suddenly plucked backwards into the air as if a spaceship had lowered a grapnel and removed him, dangling, from the earth. He had not even time to yell, could not believe in his predicament, but the gasp he gave as he left all his breath behind was enough to attract Miss Printer's attention.

" Oh good gracious," she said. " What a coincidence. Though I suppose one might have expected it in the circumstances."

" Expected *what*? "

" An elephant. Just the same, it does seem like a miracle." With a characteristically irrelevant flight, she added, " Isn't there a ballet called Miracle in the Balkans? "

" In the *Gorbals*," snapped Mr. Humphreys, who was something of a balletomane. " If you speak any elephant language, will you tell it to put me down? "

Miss Printer did not speak elephant language, but she rummaged among the remnants of the picnic for pieces of turkish delight and with these persuaded the elephant to relinquish Mr. Humphreys, who climbed, fuming and rubbing himself, into the car.

" It's a very nice *little* elephant," Miss Printer said acquisitively. " I believe it's a female. I wonder how we can get it to the monastery. Do you suppose Iskandar would sell it? "

The night was cool, and smelt of dew and rock, and the mountainside was totally silent. They might have been all alone on the southern slopes of Europe. The elephant evidently felt lonely, for it drew nearer to the car and let out a plaintive sound somewhere between a gurgle and a hoot. The sick man in the car stirred and muttered an unintelligible answer.

" What language is that? " said Mr. Humphreys uneasily.

" Russian. Where did I put that bottle of Cvicek? " She delved once more among the picnic debris and found the wine and a beaker.

" Probably the worst thing for him if he's suffering from shock," Mr. Humphreys pointed out gloomily. However Iskandar came to sufficiently under the influence of the wine to direct them to the nearest monastery, and also to assure them that

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Chloe, the elephant, would follow peaceably behind the car if she might be allowed to put her trunk in at the window and feel her master sitting inside.

They started off slowly, Miss Printer a little disappointed as she had been hoping in her romantic heart for an elephant ride through the moonlit uplands.

The brothers at the monastery took in Iskandar and his elephant without demur and, as it was now late, invited Miss Printer and Mr. Humphreys to stay for the night, giving them each a tiny guest-cell.

In the small hours Miss Printer was wakened by knocking.

"Who is it?" she called sleepily.

"The sick man is asking for you," one of the brothers whispered through the keyhole. She hastily flung on clothes and followed him to the Infirmary, a long, bare, stone room facing east over a windswept hillside. Already the dawn was beginning to show wild and green, like streaks of toothpaste in the sky.

The little man Iskandar, washed and snug, a tiny kernel in a large nut, lay peacefully in a white bed, with the sharp lines of his face filed keener by the sharp light.

"I am dying," he said matter-of-factly to Miss Printer as soon as she reached him. "You have a good face, so to you I entrust my elephant because she is a good elephant. She is a clever elephant, too. She is over seventy years old and has seen the Czar of Russia when there was a czar. She has been left me by my father, who was a great Russian landowner. After the revolution she was all that remained of his wealth. She and I escaped from Russia together. Since then we have wandered many hundreds of miles."

He gasped between his words, and one of the brothers offered a drink.

Miss Printer was crying a little.

"Don't be disturbed," Iskandar said with a touch of impatience. "I have been journeying to this place for many years. I am glad to get here. All I ask of you is that you take care of Chloe—take particular care of her ears, please—and that you arrange for her to see, once, my younger brother in London. She will carry my dying message to him. You can do this? I have his address here, on a bit of paper." He fumbled at his small bundle of possessions, and handed her a grubby scrap on which was written, in beautiful Cyrillic characters, the name Joachim Boyanus and a London address.

"Oh yes, I can easily do that."

"Good," he said, and glanced through the window. A sheepish-looking lay brother had Chloe outside, and at a command from

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her master she threaded her black snake-like trunk through the window. Iskandar caressed it almost absently and then passed it over to Miss Printer for mutual recognition and inspection.

"Now you must go," he said in a businesslike tone. "I am about to die."

Drawing closer about him the brothers began a deep-toned chant.

"Don't distress yourself, miss," said the kindly Infirmarian, who spoke good German. "It is not your fault he dies. In his condition it is amazing that he lived so long."

"But I had said that I wanted an elephant," Miss Printer wept. "And then to be given one like *this* . . ."

"But you must think of Iskandar too," the monk pointed out benignly. "How fortunate for him to meet a trustworthy English lady to carry out his last wish." Much to Miss Printer's surprise he gave her a cup of tea.

She wandered out into the windy dawn to escape from the sound of chanting and to become acquainted with her new responsibility . . .

Mr. Humphreys was frankly appalled when he heard of the matter, and more so when he discovered that he and Miss Printer would have to ride on Chloe if they were ever to reach a port.

Their car, apparently suffering from delayed effects of the collision, completely refused to start, and the nearest mechanic was fifty miles off. At length Humphreys gave in. After the monks had celebrated Iskandar's funeral with every Orthodox rite, they piled their luggage on Chloe and rolled away southwards over the mountains.

"How you expect to get past customs and quarantine I've no idea," Mr. Humphreys said sourly, but Miss Printer was perfectly serene.

"We shall manage somehow," she said. "Chloe will take care of us." And indeed Chloe took care of them to such good effect that they crossed two frontiers without troubling the Customs, sailing past the posts like something impalpable between dusk and dawn, while once, when they were ambushed by Albanian bandits as they picnicked, Chloe picked up her two riders, stowed them about her person like a boy scout tucking knife and matches into his pockets, and drifted away down a rocky hillside before the astonished brigands had their sights set for this unexpected safety device. That time Mr. Humphreys' bowler got left behind. It did not sweeten his attitude to Chloe.

In Athens, Miss Printer sent two cables, one to Joachim Boyanus, the other to her immediate superior at Rampadges:

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DOCKING HULL NOON 19TH ON KATINA PAXINOU HAVE ELEPHANT TAPESTRIES STONEWORK CUCKOO CLOCKS ETC.

It was not her fault that the Greek telegraphist, always a bit shaky on translating to the Roman alphabet, should have sent the cable as: ELEGANT TAPESTRIES STONE CUCKOO CLOCK WORKS. Nor could she have been expected to know, off in the wilds as she and Mr. Humphreys had been for the last two months, that Rampadges had been the subject of a vast take-over bid and was now under new ownership.

Nor could she have foretold that the new managing director, Mr. Appelbee, had decided to come down to the docks for a personal inspection of the rare goods brought back for the Christmas market by the firm's most discerning buyer.

Chloe and Miss Printer had suffered on the voyage. The Greek ship was a tiny one, and neither of them was a good sailor. Mr. Humphreys, chilly, correct, and unsympathetic, had visited them both impartially with basins of arrowroot.

Mr. Appelbee was in an irritable mood the day the ship docked. He was a small dyspeptic man, who looked as if he had been scrubbed all over with a fine brush and the very best soap. He had found much to criticise already in Rampadges, and was now wishing he had stayed in bed. The morning was bleak, the dock filthy, Hull a bad and foggy dream. And then the cuckoo clocks had turned out, disappointingly, not to be made of stone at all, and the tapestries not all that elegant.

It was the last straw when Miss Printer, pale and unhappy, made her appearance on the wharf followed by a small greenish elephant.

"What do you call *that*?" he snarled. "Have you been spending the firm's money on *that*? Well, I tell you frankly, you had better take the next boat back to where you've come from and get rid of it. There's no place for elephants in the new Rampadges—nor for damn fools who buy such damnfool objects!"

Miss Printer looked round for Mr. Humphreys to give her moral support, but he had gone, walking elegantly off to chat to the manager of the Transport Department, and when she saw this craven betrayal the last shred of her love blew away in the chilly breeze.

She nerved herself.

"Mr. Appelbee," she said, "you may have got enough money to buy Rampadges, but you can't buy the loyalty of its employees. Loyalty has to be earned.

"I had intended to *give* Chloe to the firm, but I've changed my mind. Since she saved my life we've grown very close. Looking after her, taking the splinters out of her feet, and washing her

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ears, has taught me something. You can give affection to an elephant that you can't give to a firm, Mr. Appelbee. I'm going to keep Chloe for myself, and here is my resignation for you. I'm sure you will find Mr. Humphreys an excellent buyer when he has learnt a few more languages."

And she turned away, taking Chloe's trunk under her arm, and walked briskly along the dock. A dark and bearded man in a city suit came up to her.

"Miss Printer?" he said. "I am Joachim Boyanus. I thank you for letting me meet Chloe once again."

Chloe was delighted to see him. She wreathed her trunk round his neck.

"I have taken good care of her," said Miss Printer, looking at him very directly with her clear grey eyes. Joachim turned back the flap of one huge leather ear and saw a great many pieces of slate-coloured sticking-plaster. Thoughtfully he pulled one loose and found under it a diamond as large as a hazel nut.

"Ah yes," he said. "The family diamonds. I wondered where Iskandar had hidden them all these years. It was kind of him to send them, and kind of you to bring them. But really, you know, I have done so comfortably in the City that I hardly need them. Would you accept them, Miss Printer?"

"I?" She was dumbfounded.

"You have just left your job," he pointed out. "Could you not use them? What would you like most to do?"

"Oh," she said, starry-eyed. "Travel, of course. Travel with Chloe."

"Miss Printer," he said, "you are a woman after my own heart. For some time I have been intending to leave the City, whose moneymaking possibilities I have explored to the uttermost, and wander off to an older and more peaceable world. Could we not go together, you and I and Chloe?"

They looked at one another, liking what they saw.

And since nothing is very difficult if two people are mutually attracted, and have plenty of money and a well-disposed elephant, it is probable that they are travelling still.

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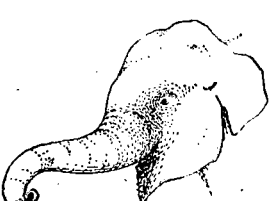

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OLD CUIRASSIER

BY GEOFFREY HOUSEHOLD

YOUNG Georges Dumont, garage proprietor and agricultural engineer, crashed his motor cycle into first gear, roared the engine, and dismounted at the door of Papa Arneguy's cottage. On the valley slopes the silent, orderly beds of the market garden were intensely green and black in the last of the setting sun.

"Attention!" he yelled. "Radishes into column of troop, right wheel!"

Père Arneguy looked up from the seedsman's catalogue upon which he was making notes—without glasses, though he was well over sixty. He found the youth of his native village a little comic; it did not believe in doing anything with hand or foot which could possibly be done by electricity or a two-stroke engine. But, if motor cycles had to exist, that was the way to stop them—with a flourish.

"It never existed, your order," he replied peaceably. "Will you take a glass?"

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" Willingly," said Georges Dumont.

Père Arneguy always had excellent wine, though heaven only knew how he had the ready cash to buy it after feeding his large self and his larger horse.

" But I have little time . . . an urgent duty—"

" It is always the same with the young," said Arneguy, wiping out excuses from the air round him with a wave of his enormous hand. " You spend so much time mending your machines that you have none for anything else."

" And you, you old cave artist, how many hours a day do you spend grooming the Shah? "

It exasperated the younger generation of the village of Achard that Papa Arneguy should continue to work his three hectares of land with hand tools and a horse when a cultivator—as Georges Dumont had proved to him a dozen times—could be bought on hire purchase and would pay for itself in two years. Fathers and grandfathers were just as obstinate, but from sheer inability to understand the economics of machinery. The infuriating thing about Papa Arneguy was that his arithmetic remained sound and his intelligence quick. He was not out of date because he couldn't help it. He chose to be out of date.

He was a typical Basque from the region of Oloron Ste Marie, individualist all through. In 1914 he had gone to war as a cuirassier, helmeted, breastplated, and making as much noise at the trot as a cartload of cymbals. When provoked—which was often, since his thundering good humour in argument could entertain a whole café—he maintained that such gay and useless ironmongery had been far more satisfying to the human spirit than sitting at the bottom of a trench with a lot of machines which might or might not work when they were needed.

He still looked the part. Those great shoulders and long grey moustaches belonged to the cuirassier. Georges Dumont admitted that a squadron of Arneguys might indeed have had the moral effect of a tank. Yet, while working his land, the same shoulders and moustache gave an impression of utmost peace and benignity. So did the Shah, a barrel-shaped halfbred Percheron, whose keep alone used up one of Arneguy's three hectares.

" It's always when I can't stop that someone offers me burgundy as good as this," said Dumont, regretfully.

" What's your hurry? There is plenty more."

" Flood warning. I am on my way downriver."

" There has been no flood here since Noah. Look at the river—decently in her bed like a good bourgeoise! "

" All the same, she may not be alone between the sheets tonight."

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"So they are still working up there, are they?"

With a shrug of his massive shoulders, Père Arneguy indicated the foothills above the village where contractors and engineers were busy excavating, tunnelling, and damming at the head of the wooded valley.

"It's a long business—that sort of undertaking," Dumont answered, rushing to the defence of fellow technicians. "And you have nothing against their using electricity, I suppose?"

Arneguy mischievously shrugged his shoulders. In fact he had a high opinion of electricity.

"It's true one hasn't got to take a spanner to it," he said.

"And what in heaven's name is wrong with a spanner? This from him who farms with a sword and rake like an ancient Roman!"

Père Arneguy grinned at the retort. He enjoyed a ferocious mock battle with Georges Dumont. He did in fact keep a vast cuirassier's sabre hanging on the wall of his cottage, and it was not wholly for decoration. In one point he obeyed the laws of economics: he kept nothing he did not use. The sword, which had as fine an edge on it as his scythe, was occasionally drawn from its scabbard for odd jobs too delicate for the billhook and too heavy for the pruning-knife.

As for the rake, it was the proud jest of the village. Arneguy liked beds of noble width: parade grounds of crumbly loam where lettuces, radishes, and spring onions were massed in column. Once the crop had been thinned, no weed was allowed to grow so large that a hoe would be required to remove it. The rake was sufficient.

It was a formidable weapon of his own invention, with four-inch tines and a nine-foot handle. His immense forearm handled the tool as delicately as a toothpick, stirring the soil between a dozen lettuces simultaneously.

"All the same, when I make a thing it lasts."

"But one cannot foresee freaks of geology, Père Arneguy. There must be a cave in the limestone below the centre of the lake. They say there was a swirl on the surface as if a plug had been pulled out when they began excavating, but the dam itself is as immovable as ever."

"The water has risen?"

"It is beginning. In the gorge east of the main workings. If they cannot control it, the flood will come tonight and last four or five hours. Achard is in no danger, but all livestock and farm machinery must be moved from the bank of the river. Incredible, the activity!"

"And the island?"

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"There will be a team and trucks in half an hour to evacuate the island. Will you let the widow Ibarre know, and see that she is sensible?"

"At once," said Père Arneguy, driving right home the cork of the bottle with his grey-haired fist.

As the roar of the motor cycle faded away between the hills he tramped down to the river at the bottom of his land. For most of its course it was a mountain torrent, but at the lower end of the little Achard valley it was blocked by the boulders of old moraine through which the water tumbled down to the Gave d'Oloron.

Above these rapids it gave the impression of some peaceful tributary with a fertile island floating in the middle of it. Upon the island an ancient, whitewashed farmhouse stood well above the level of the spring floods.

Now, in autumn, it was hardly an island at all. On the eastern side the water divided into several little branches running between pebble shoals. To the west it was separated from Arneguy's land by a channel some eighty feet wide, knee-deep, and flickering with small trout shaped like miniatures of the island.

Père Arneguy hailed the farm. Marie-Claire came to fetch him with the punt, pulling herself across the channel by a slack and dripping cable which stretched between two little stone landing-stages—one beneath the farmhouse windows, the other on the river bank.

It was a very wet and primitive method of ferrying. Père Arneguy had several times offered to instal a running mooring instead of a single cable fastened to ring-bolts. Marie-Claire, who was twelve years old and prided herself on being up to date, was all in favour. Her mother, Madame Ibarre, was not. She insisted that they would never feel safe in their beds if anyone could pull the punt back from the island.

Marie-Claire was excited by the news. Her island was to be the centre of fascinating efficiency merely for the cost of a foot of water on the ground floor.

Madame Ibarre, however, was incredulous, then tearful, then appalled. She imagined the dam emptying in a wall of water.

Arneguy considered they were both wrong, but long life as a fatherly bachelor had taught him that women found comfort in exaggeration.

Georges Dumont, at any rate, had been exact. Five large trucks appeared on the river bank with a team of workmen under the supervision of one of the contracting engineers. His first duty appeared to be public relations. He assured Madame that

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the entire organisation was at her service. She and her charming daughter would be spared all possible inconvenience and indemnified against any financial loss.

Even while he was talking, the farm as a human home began to disappear. The punt was unshackled and pulled on shore ready for loading. A timber ramp and rolls of wire netting went into the channel.

The trucks began to cross and pull out again loaded with furniture, implements, and animals. All breakables were carried up to the top floor, for there might be no time to pack them. Urgency was in the floodlights and the silent figure who sat on the bank with his walkie-talkie.

Père Arneguy felt old. There was nothing for him to do, not even a haul for the powerful quarters of the Shah. It was no longer a neighbour's business to deal with emergencies. Trained men did it better. By ten o'clock the farm had been stripped, and Madame and Marie-Claire were housed with relations in Achard. There was even a champagne supper laid out with the compliments of the contractors.

He went to bed with his clothes on—aware that it was no more than an old cuirassier's gesture—and slept soundly. Before breakfast he examined the river and its lifeless island. The water was discoloured and had possibly risen an inch or two; but there was no sign of flood.

At half past eight he was cleaning out the stable when he heard the whoosh of powerful rockets. One would have said it was the fourteenth of July. He approved of the technicians. That was the good old way to give warning—better than the telephone and their little wireless sets.

He strolled round the corner of the stable in time to see a wall of water higher than a man sweep down the bed of the river and break on the bows of the island, throwing up a curtain of spray which hid the trees. There were no rockets. The noise had been the rush of the wave.

When the spray fell, the island was not there, only the farm and its buildings standing in a lake. Beyond them, over the pebbles and fields to the east, the river had risen to its fullest spring width. The current steadied. For second after second the water climbed the stubble on the lower slope of Père Arneguy's land. It would do no harm there. The Shah's rations for the year were already in the barn.

The shutters of a top floor window flew open, and Marie-Claire came through on to the iron balcony. The lake which surrounded her again became a torrent as the water surged clear over the boulders and narrows at the lower end of the valley.

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The old cowshed upstream from the farmhouse crumbled and vanished.

Both banks were filling with the inhabitants of Achard—firemen, police, the mayor, and a newsreel cameraman. As he ran to meet them, Père Arneguy looked, from force of habit, for the town band. The contractors had sent a powerful rescue squad in case of unforeseen emergency: men, ropes, an amphibious vehicle, a rubber dinghy. He waved to them, pointing to Marie-Claire. The thunder of the water made shouting useless.

They were fast, the engineers. No denying that. In two minutes they had launched their amphibian well upstream. Two minutes later she was hurled back into the shallows, riding at the end of her cable over Arneguy's stubble.

They tried again, attaching light lines to the crew of two and providing the boat with an anchor weighted by a block of concrete. This time her engines took her far enough out. The anchor went overboard and the crew paid out the cable, bringing her nearly into position under the balcony. But anchor and weight were rolling together down the bed of the river. The amphibian vanished. The crew were pulled ashore.

It was clear that in such a race boats were as useless as Madame Ibarre's outstretched arms and the incoherent advice which she screamed across the water.

Marie-Claire herself, now that rescue was on the way, seemed astonishingly self-disciplined. The poise of the fair head and brown school uniform impressed Père Arneguy. She belonged to the youth which knew so much. Perhaps she was right to be confident.

"But what happened, madame?" he asked. "I cannot conceive . . ."

"She forgot her homework."

"You mean—for a damned exercise book?"

"But who would have thought it?" wept Madame Ibarre. "I wondered why she left so early for school. Who could have guessed what she intended? When one's home is in danger, does one think of bits of paper carried up to the attic?

"She must have crossed from the other bank. She often does so when she is too impatient to pull herself over in the boat. Mon dieu! Mon dieu! She jumped from shoal to shoal like a little deer. It used to delight me to watch her."

"But the warning, madame?" protested the smooth young engineer who had supervised the removal the night before. "Achard had ten minutes' warning."

"She was already on her way here. And I who thought she was at school!"

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"Tell Madame there is no need to worry, Père Arneguy," whispered Georges Dumont. "She will listen to you. They have ordered up a helicopter."

"How long will it be, your helicopter?"

"Half an hour at the most."

The outbuildings upstream, which had been acting as bastion to the house, disappeared. There was not even a splash. The old grey mortar had quietly reached a limit of resistance as the water sucked at the dry holes where generations of lizards had hidden and bred.

Someone in the crowd hoisted a placard for Marie-Claire to read: HELICOPTER ON THE WAY.

The child waved, and then turned in alarm as she felt the house shudder. The ground floor was divided by a wide archway where in old days the farm carts had been kept. Arneguy saw the great wooden doors which closed it give way. Immediately afterwards there was a swirl at the downstream end of the house. The wall at the back of the coach-house had gone. The top floor was nothing but a doubtful bridge over the current.

"We will try to catch her at the narrows," said the engineer. He spoke into the machine on his back, asking his headquarters for a heavy steel net.

"Keep your men here!" Père Arneguy recommended. "They can help me."

"Your farm, I assure you, is quite safe."

The former cuirassier towered above him, pulling his moustache. Then he turned away and lumbered up to his cottage.

"They are amazing, these old peasants!" said the engineer, and then shouted, "ah, but here at last is Jean-Paul!"

Jean-Paul rolled through the shallows, a monstrous squat crane on six sets of caterpillar tracks. Jean-Paul turned, lowered the sixty-foot jib of his crane and roared straight for the island. He would be recovered when the flood went down. Meanwhile if he could get far enough before the engine stopped . . .

Jean-Paul stopped and rolled slowly over on his side. His driver jumped for it and was dragged ashore. The monster continued to wallow in the river until the crane jib jammed on the bottom.

To the onlookers it was a relief, after that colossal fall, to see Papa Arneguy trotting down the slope of his land bareback upon the Shah, with his sword in his right hand and his great rake over his left shoulder. There was a ripple of nervous laughter.

"He has forgotten his helmet."

"What's he going to do with his one horsepower?"

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"One would say Don Quixote, a Basque Quixote!"

Papa Arneguy rode up to the engineer and delivered his orders.

"You," he roared, using the disrespectful second person singular of the old army, "occupy yourself with a cigarette! For five minutes I command here. After that, do what you like."

His eyes crossed those of a grey-haired foreman who had volunteered for the amphibian and was still coughing the water out of his lungs.

"You—second-in-command—on your feet, and take another glass! Lying down like that, you don't give the brandy a chance to mix with the water. Pick me the best of your men! A light line round the Shah here—pull him ashore if he's in trouble! The rope I take with me round my waist. Get your men to pay it out as soon as you see what is happening. Don't let them drag me back—understand? When I have the rope across, rig a loop to run on it and take your rubber boat over. It offers no resistance, that boat. To work!"

"It's not possible, Père Arneguy," Dumont begged. "Don't get yourself killed for nothing! The helicopter will be here in a few moments."

Arneguy leaned over the Shah's withers and tapped him affectionately on the shoulder. "And then a few more moments while he comes down to borrow a spanner. You know where you can put your helicopter, Georges?"

He wrapped the end of the rope round his body and rode the Shah over the familiar field until the water was up to his thighs. As he approached the old bank of the river he turned the horse's head to the current and edged him sideways. The water swirled against the Shah's great chest.

The foreman, quick to see what was needed, led his men into the shallows as far as they could safely go and kept a strain on the line.

Père Arneguy reached down and began to rake the bottom far out to his left. Even Madame Ibarre did not see what he was up to. The racing surface of the water looked so permanent. It needed an effort of the imagination to recover a memory of what the channel had been a quarter of an hour earlier.

At last he raked up the ferry cable. It was still far from obvious what use that was. Neither man nor rubber dinghy could cross by it. The sheer weight of slack waterlogged rope would drag them under.

He clung to the cable and let his rake go. There was no holding it without a third hand. He shouted, "Tell the neighbours downstream! It is useful, my rake."

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Then he drew the full length of his sword twice across the cable, and twisted a severed strand round his left wrist. He slipped off the Shah's back and sliced at the cable a third time. It parted, and the current had him.

At last on land they understood. "Pay out! Let him go."

Père Arneguy, clinging to the long end of the severed cable, was hurled down and across the stream in a quarter circle with the ring-bolt on the island landing-stage as its centre.

In twenty seconds the cable was taut, stretched parallel to the wall of the house and some six feet out from it. He pulled himself upriver, yard by yard and hand over hand, until he was below the balcony.

The problem now was to pass up to Marie-Claire the end of the second rope which was round his waist. If she could haul it through the window and make it fast, the dinghy could, with luck, travel along the rope like the old punt.

But Marie-Claire was now, he saw, incapable with fear. Useless to give her orders yet. If only she had been a man! A little army language would be just the thing to bring her to her senses.

"Listen, Marie-Claire," he said gently. "Have you a pair of sheets or tablecloths or even strong cord?"

"No, no, no; nothing!"

"Go and look, ma mignonne. Go and look in the attic. There is plenty of time and no danger."

While he waited he lay on his back. Like that he seemed to plane easily over the rush of water which no longer piled up against mouth and nostrils.

She came back with an old carriage rein. He expected to find it rotten, but never mind! Once started on activity, she could go off and find something else.

"Good girl!" he said. "Take a turn round the balcony corner-post. At the bottom—that's right. Now throw me the end."

The leather seemed solid enough. Madame Ibarre, years before, must have stored it away well greased.

"There! I shall now tie this rope which is round my middle to the reins," he announced in the tone of a village conjuror. "No deception. You see that I have only one hand free. Therefore the knot will be poor. Pull it in quickly and gently, and then tie the rope to a beam. Tie it well, for the lives of men depend on you."

Marie-Claire at last smiled. She hauled in the rope and vanished through the window with the end of it. Père Arneguy could see the excitement on the bank. The grey-haired foreman was up to his waist in the shallows paying out the other end of the

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rope. Behind him were his men, rigging a block and pulley on the rubber dinghy.

But Marie-Claire returned, still with the rope's end.

" I cannot reach the beam, Monsieur Arneguy."

" Stand on a chair, ma mignonne."

" There is no chair. All the furniture and the chests have gone. There is nothing."

" What is in the room with you? "

" Only our crockery and our wine."

Père Arneguy let go the streaming ferry cable, and tried to pull himself up to the balcony by the reins. He had not the strength.

He looped the reins under his arms and rested. That, then, was the end of his plan.

" Could we not wait for the helicopter? " she asked.

He could feel through the leather the shuddering of the house. While they talked, a stone quoin had fallen from the corner.

Ah well, the town band would have something to do after all. At sixty-three, one couldn't feel cheated. And to rest when one was so tired—at the moment it was perfectly acceptable even if one had to rest for ever. All the same, Marie-Claire wouldn't agree at all. At twelve, one hadn't nearly enough of one's own absurdities.

" If the wine is there, you might as well pass me a bottle, Marie-Claire."

" Willingly, Monsieur Arneguy. But I have no corkscrew."

" Never forget, my child, that there are very few tools necessary to the life of man. A corkscrew and a good blade are among them. I have both together in my pocket."

Marie-Claire showed no more sign of panic now that she had companionship. She lowered the bottle by means of a stick, her belt, and a hair ribbon.

Père Arneguy drew the cork and swallowed a quarter of the contents. He felt better. It seemed a pity not to let his last taste of wine rest on the palate. He drank a second quarter more slowly. His imagination revived.

" They are perfectly right," he informed Marie-Claire, " when they say old men cannot change their plans in a hurry. I will return you to your mother in one-third of a minute."

" I will do what you tell me, Monsieur Arneguy."

" Have you the courage to slip down the reins into my arms? "

" It doesn't need much to do that, Monsieur Arneguy."

" And then you must not struggle. Even if we are under water the whole way, we shall recover. They'll soon empty us out on the other side."

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"I promise."

"Very well. Then since there is nothing in the house to which you can tie the rope and the posts of the balcony cannot be trusted, it shall go round my stomach again. How curious that neither of us has a waist! You are too young and I am too old. So pass me the rope's end, if you please, Marie-Claire."

Père Arneguy knotted the slack under his arms. He was now attached to the balcony by the reins and to the far bank by the rope. As soon as he cut the reins he would cross the channel exactly as he had done before, sweeping down and across in a quarter circle with—this time—the foreman as its centre.

"Down then, my little one!"

She hesitated. Only in a nightmare could mass move at the pace of those smooth tons of water. Even that kindly head and dripping moustache, like those of some zoo seal waiting for fish, could not take away the menace.

The balcony and its wall began a slow, hardly-perceptible swaying. The moment had come to use the voice of the cuirassier. "Quick!" he roared. "Quick, will you, nom de dieu!"

Marie-Claire climbed over the balcony railings. Her hands slid down the leather held taut by Père Arneguy's weight. His knife notched the edge of the reins, and they ripped apart.

It was a worse journey than the first. For two there was no chance of keeping upon the surface of such a battering of water. His last conscious thought was that all the trout must have been carried away and pulped in the rapids. They were the last two. But caught. Held fast on the line by his second-in-command. A good type, that. He locked his fingers into Marie-Claire's hair.

It seemed to him that Madame Ibarre was trying to pry them loose. He held on tight. It was only when he felt without doubt Marie-Claire's smaller fingers among his own that he loosened his grip.

"Incredible!" he heard someone say. "And to think he had the coolness to down a bottle while he waited. We are not the men our fathers were."

"I am ashamed of myself," Georges Dumont confessed.

"What's that? What's that rubbish?" murmured Père Arneguy in the ghost of a roar. "No reason to be. It's not that you lack courage, Georges. It's that you have too much faith in machines."

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NOTICE IN ANDORRA CINEMA

Don't put all your Basques in one exit.

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WAITING GAME

A light flared briefly at a window high up in the dark house

BY JOHN SALT

ERNEST "SNUFFY" WILLOW, ferret-faced and disingenuous, occupied a wooden armchair facing Inspector Rosewarne's desk in his foggy Holborn office.

Snuffy twitched uneasily in the chair, staring with dark suspicion at Rosewarne and his aide, the big detective-sergeant, Jack Manbre. "What's the pitch, then?" he demanded at last with querulous belligerence.

Rosewarne regarded him companionably through wreathing pipe smoke and reached across to take a blackened, oily roll of canvas from Manbre. He spread it out on the desk and silently contemplated the row of housebreaking tools it contained.

Snuffy gazed at them too, as one hypnotised. Then a grin of ancient guile flickered briefly around his faded brown moustache. He leaned back in his chair. "It's a fair cop," he agreed. "So what 'ave we got to chin about?"

Rosewarne eyed him sourly. "How often have you been inside, Willow?"

"'Alf me blooming life. You ought to know, seeing you cut your own eye-teeth on me."

Rosewarne took his pipe from his mouth and poked at the bowl with a pencil stub. He said carefully, "That was a stupid business tonight, Willow. Seems to me you wanted to get pinched. Why? Weather too cold, or have you got the wind up?"

Rosewarne stood up and went to the window. The street lamp outside cast a foggy yellow radiance over his lean grey face with its cleft chin and arrogant nose.

"I took a short walk tonight," he said. "Just from St. Giles High Street to the Lane. I reckon I met every known crook in the Metropolitan area in the space of half a mile. You know damn well the Elephant and Charlton boys don't poach north of the river without good reason. But they're all here tonight, slap in the middle of my manor." He swung suddenly on Willow and rapped at him, "What's the good word, Willow? Tell me why."

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Snuffy watched him uneasily. "I bin charged," he said. "You got no right to hike me up here and start asking questions. I know me rights, remember."

"You certainly ought to," Rosewarne observed dryly. "Come on, Willow, better talk. I'm offering you a chance you don't deserve. I needn't be plainer than that."

Snuffy laughed hollowly. "Fat chance," he said. "Look 'ere, guv, I'm no nark. Why waste your breath?"

"You've talked before," Rosewarne reminded him.

"You've got no call to bring that up. Anyway, them days was different."

"Not so different," the inspector said quietly.

Snuffy shook his head. "Sorry, guv, I'm not with you. Can I go to me nice warm cell now?"

Rosewarne came swiftly back to his desk and flung himself into the swivel chair. He leaned forward and spoke urgently. "Look, you can tell me this much. Is this anything to do with Madden? Is he coming here?"

"What a lot of fog we're having these days, Inspector," Snuffy remarked in a voice of dreadful gentility.

Rosewarne slapped the flat of his hand on the desk. "All right, I should have known you wouldn't talk about Madden. Well then, let's talk about Salvini; it's an easy jump. What's the big man up to these days, Snuffy? I should think he'd be interested in the visitors, too."

Snuffy stood up slowly, five foot nothing of unsuccessful sneak thief with a prison record as long as a man's arm. Yet Manbre, watching him, was conscious of an odd moment of dignity, and knew that for once Snuffy Willow was probably telling the truth.

"You got me up 'ere on false pretences, Ted Rosewarne," he said. "You know what I think of Salvini and what I'd do to him if I got the chance. I don't mix with the Children, you know that, too. But if I was to meet up with Mr. perishin' Ugo Salvini social-like out in the street, I'd say, 'Good morning, Mr. Salvini; yes, Mr. Salvini; three bags full, Mr. Salvini.' And when 'e'd gone by I'd be 'oping a truck would come along and flatten 'im, or one of 'is bright boys would come up behind and slip 'im a chiv."

"One of his boys like Jimmy Madden?" Rosewarne inquired softly.

Snuffy flicked his bright glance at him. "I didn't say that," he said flatly. "I didn't say nothing."

"Ugo Salvini runs dope," Rosewarne said quietly.

"Prove it," Snuffy Willow told him contemptuously. "Then 'ang 'im with my blessing. And now, if you'll excuse me, the

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sergeant is waiting to lock me up. Unless you want to go bail for me."

Rosewarne grinned unkindly. "I'll do better than that. Get out of here. I'm not taking up the charge."

Willow goggled at him and waved a hand towards the tool bag. "It was a fair cop," he gasped. "You got to take me in."

Rosewarne shook his head. "Not tonight, Snuffy. This is the chance I was talking about. You get back there on the streets and keep your eyes open."

Snuffy eyed him nervously. "If I thought you could do it—"

"Do what?"

"Fix Salvini."

"Well?"

"I might tell you something."

"Let's have it."

Snuffy drew one corner of his sad moustache into his mouth and sucked it thoughtfully. "You'd 'ave to take me in," he temporised. "I don't want to be wandering loose when the trouble starts."

"Fair enough. I'll book you. What do you know?"

Relief smoothed Snuffy's features. He said eagerly, "I saw 'is sister tonight, just before your mate jumped me—" he jerked a thumb at Manbre.

Rosewarne spoke sharply. "Whose sister? Madden's?"

The little man nodded. "That's the one. Saw her a couple of hours back outside that Bon Bagai place."

"Salvini's restaurant in Kemble Street," Manbre put in.

Rosewarne nodded impatiently. "What was she doing?"

Snuffy shrugged. "Nothing, just looking at it as if she wanted to go in and 'adn't the nerve."

"I see. You saw the sister and decided the brother might not be too far away. So you got the breeze up and decided to fix yourself the safest billet you could think of: a cell at Holborn Central."

Snuffy nodded sheepishly. "That's about it."

"Happily we can accommodate you," Rosewarne said grimly. "Take him downstairs again, Sergeant Manbre."

At the door Snuffy turned again. "Jimmy Madden's all right," he said.

"Jimmy Madden is a violent criminal on the run from Dartmoor," Rosewarne told him icily. "He left one of my men for dead and richly deserved the seven years they gave him."

"There's some say 'e didn't," Snuffy whined. "Anyway, 'e never 'andled the white stuff. And I'll tell you this for nothing. 'E'll do for Salvini if 'e gets 'is 'ands on 'im."

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Rosewarne shrugged. " You've got a point," he said. " Now be off with you."

When Manbre returned, the inspector was finishing a telephone conversation. He put down the phone and glanced at his sergeant. " What did you make of Willow? "

Manbre looked puzzled. " Did he help? "

" He helped all right. Not enough, of course. That was too much to hope."

" He has helped you before? "

Rosewarne looked sombre. " He did help once, a long time ago. You wouldn't think so to look at him now, but Ernie Willow was respectable enough once upon a time. He used to keep a tobacconist's shop in the Garden. Then his missus went off the rails: began drinking, and then doping. They found her in the river at Blackfriars a good twenty years back. I don't think Snuffy has drawn an honest breath since. But there's one thing he's straight about and that's drugs. He'd shop any doper if he got the chance."

" But not Salvini? "

" No, Salvini's too big. Snuffy is scared of him. They all are."

" What did he mean about not mixing with the Children? "

" The Ragazzi Siciliani—the gang we call the Children."

" What's their speciality? "

" Anything you could name, including narcotics—that's Salvini's pidgin. You have to get these boys in focus. They aren't master crooks or any of that newspaper nonsense; most of them are smalltimers like Snuffy Willow. The original group were Italian trapeze artists; and that sort of training comes in pretty handy for burglary. They were well organised, with headquarters in Soho. Now, they have a strong leader. Salvini is tough and he's clever. We have nothing at all on him, as Willow pointed out. There's only one weakness so far as I can see—the struggle for power at the top."

" Is that what's happening now? "

" Maybe. Madden worked for the Children. The story goes that Salvini shopped him and then Madden threatened to swing for him. That may or may not be true, but Madden's sister thinks it is and she's had a couple of goes at getting the case reopened. Madden broke from the Moor a week ago, and my guess is that he'll come here to settle with Salvini. The Ragazzi think so, too. That's why they are flocking into Holborn.

" Salvini's their leader but they hate him. But by the same token they won't help Madden, either. They'll sit on the fence like a flock of carrion crows and swoop for the pickings when

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the fight's over. Only, before then I hope to do a little swoop of my own which could put paid to the Children."

Ugo Salvini's plate glass and chromium Bon Bagai restaurant was not looking its best when Rosewarne and Manbre called there at eight in the morning. Refuse bins crowded the pavement outside, and the wide windows of the restaurant were grimed with the fog of the previous night. The main door had been propped ajar, and from within came the drone of vacuum cleaners.

A bulky man, unshaven and in his shirtsleeves, stepped forward to explain that the restaurant was not open, then recognised the inspector. Panic flared briefly in his eyes.

"Not you, Cil. Not today," said Rosewarne smoothly. "Where's your boss?"

Manbre jerked his head towards a group of men gathered on a small stage at the far end of the long dining-room. Rosewarne nodded and began to advance purposefully across the carpet.

A man disengaged himself from the group and came forward to meet the inspector.

Ugo Salvini was short but very powerfully built, his shoulders square-set beneath the unpadded fine cloth of his black greatcoat. His dark hair was set in tight oily waves over a wide forehead, veins laced his heavy cheeks, and his jowls had a purple tinge. His mouth was tiny and precise with very red lips, the chin beneath it was beginning to go just a little, but the general effect was of hardness unredeemed by humour or mercy. Ugo Salvini was born to lead and to be hated.

"You're around early," Rosewarne said.

"Time is money," Salvini said curtly. "What brings you here, Inspector?"

"I'm looking for James Madden."

Salvini narrowed his eyelids but no trace of expression showed in his face. "He would not come here," he said simply.

"Why not? You were his friend."

"Alas no, never a friend! I employed him as manager in one of my enterprises. Unhappily Mr. Madden, as you would say, went wrong. It was regrettable."

"Highly. But from whose point of view?"

"His own, of course, and that of society."

"Society would matter to you, would it?"

"But of course. I am a citizen. I pay taxes."

"Just so. And your chances would be greatly improved with Madden's sister once he was safely out of the way."

The purple in Salvini's jowls flooded into his cheeks. For a second he looked apoplectic. Then he rounded on Rosewarne.

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"You go too far, policeman," snarled Ugo Salvini angrily.

Rosewarne grinned affably. "She was here last night; I think she is still. My advice is: forget any little plans you may have made for her. Anything you do I shall know about."

"The police are omniscient," Salvini said nastily.

"So long as you remember that . . . Now I want to see her."

Salvini stared at him, then answered slowly. "But of course, Inspector, nothing simpler." He called in Italian to one of the men on the dance band stage. The man went through a door at the back of the dais and returned a moment later with Paula Madden. She walked gravely up to Salvini and took his arm.

The Sicilian looked slyly at Rosewarne. "You see, Inspector? We are friends."

Paula Madden was a small girl, barely as tall as Salvini, but her figure was good and she walked well. Her face now was pale and the eyes shadowed, but she was pretty enough and smart in a fitted lilac coat with fur on the collar. The clothes looked expensive, and Salvini's attitude was patently proprietorial. Rosewarne took another look at them both and decided he had had enough.

Salvini leaned forward provocatively, and Rosewarne caught the smell of brandy on his breath. "Seen enough, Inspector?"

Rosewarne said harshly, "Too much. Salvini, you'd do well to stay with the people who love you. Madden isn't one of them, and I can't say I blame him."

Salvini laughed aloud. "I am touched by your solicitude."

"Don't kid yourself, Salvini," Rosewarne told him angrily. "You are the bait in the trap. Madden will come here to get you, and I shall get him." He looked once more at the girl. "You're in bad company, Miss Madden. I suppose you realise that."

Her eyes rested for a second on his and Rosewarne was shocked to read the stark appeal in them. But she swiftly turned her head away. Salvini was still sneering as the two police officers walked out into the foggy gloom of Kemble Street.

Rosewarne said sharply to Manbre, "That girl's in trouble, Jack. Keep an eye out for her."

"A pleasure," the sergeant remarked dryly, and turned to retrace his steps. "See you."

"See you," Rosewarne rejoined mechanically.

At Holborn Central he found an unexpected visitor—Chief Detective Inspector Donald Retallack from Scotland Yard, an officer of imperial girth and acute intellect. Rosewarne looked at him questioningly, and the senior detective gave a deprecating shrug.

"Look, Ted, it's not that we think the job is too much for you to handle, but Madden has been loose for nearly ten days now.

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The Press has made a Roman holiday of it and the Yard is just the least bit sore."

Rosewarne nodded glumly. "How much help do I get?"

"Full emergency, the lot. But it's your pidgin, Ted."

Rosewarne walked to a large-scale wall map of the area. "Salvini is holed up here in Kemble Street. I've thrown a scare into him and he'll stay put. That's where Madden will go, we hope. We can seal off all exits—it's a nice tight little manor even allowing for this blasted fog. The only way to make sure of Madden is to pounce at the right moment. That presupposes a great deal of luck. What's the latest?"

"Traced to Southampton two nights ago. The trail died after that. If he has any sense he won't come."

"He'll come," Rosewarne said with finality. "I'll be sorry if he doesn't."

Retallack gave him a sharp look. "What's on your mind, Ted?"

"An illegal thought. If it wasn't my plain duty to pick up James Madden as an escaped convict and a dangerous criminal, I could find it in my heart to wish that he could reach Salvini and wring his blasted neck."

Rosewarne spent the afternoon touring his checkpoints and receiving reports from the radio car patrols. The fog thickened as the day died.

At six he returned to Otway Street in a mood of barely-suppressed irritability.

Retallack had news for him. "Madden's in London. He was spotted at Mansion House half an hour ago."

"Is this a squeak?" Rosewarne asked suspiciously.

Retallack shook his head. "No, a traffic constable going off duty caught sight of him coming out of the station."

"Tackle him?"

"No chance. There were crowds of people making for the trains and he slipped away into the fog."

"So he's coming after all," said Rosewarne. "Let's go over the plans of the fort again."

The two men still had their heads together when Manbre burst in, red in the face and breathless, with news that threw the whole plan out of gear. "Salvini's hopped the twig. He's gone from the Bon Bagai, nobody knows where. It can't be far, he must have gone on foot because his car is still outside. Not that he could have driven it in this."

Rosewarne cut in angrily, "But when did you find this out?"

"Ten minutes ago. I ran all the way here. He must have slipped out the back way and dodged the cordon in the fog."

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"And the girl?"

"It looks as if he took her with him. But I think I'm on to something just the same."

Rosewarne threw himself into his chair. "That's fine," he said savagely. "You lose our number one lead but you're on to something. Let's have it then."

"I've talked to the girl."

"You've what? What did you find out?"

"You were right enough, she's in dead trouble." Manbre pushed his hair back and wiped a hand over his forehead. "Seems she never believed her brother was guilty. Oh, she admits he's a bad hat, but not the type to go coshing coppers. She thinks that Salvini fixed—"

"I know that yarn," Rosewarne said wearily.

"Salvini had been chasing her for a long time, but she wasn't having any. When her brother escaped she guessed that he'd make at once for Salvini and then there might be murder. Salvini's got the notion of holding the girl as hostage for Madden's good behaviour. She's scared stiff."

"How does this help us?"

"I'm coming to that. Salvini told her that he'd got to leave soon, and he was going to take her with him just in case. She got the idea that he had a quiet hideout somewhere in the neighbourhood that only he knew about. He'd been drinking a lot—and he let something slip about a packet he had to pick up."

"A packet," Rosewarne whooped. "How did you get her to talk to you, for heaven's sake?"

"I was on my knees," Manbre said with feeling. "On my knees in the mud at the back of that perishing clip-joint in Kemble Street, talking to her through a grating. She was down in the cellars. I suppose she was trying to find a way out while I was trying to find a way in. We didn't have long.

"I took a couple of men in and got hold of the manager. He was in a real panic. The place was swarming with the Ragazzi, gibbering in a dozen different languages about how Salvini had skipped."

Rosewarne groaned. "Well, if that's all you're on to, it doesn't help us much."

Manbre said triumphantly. "It isn't all. I think we can find Salvini. Paula Madden said to tackle Snuffy Willow. He looked after the Madden kids when they were young. And he knows more about Salvini than anyone else in London."

Rosewarne snorted. "Well, get him up here, and quick about it."

He stood drumming his fingers impatiently on the desk until the sergeant returned with the bewildered Snuffy.

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"You," Rosewarne bellowed, pointing an accusing finger. "Where would Ugo Salvini go to pick up a packet? Talk, damn you."

Snuffy recoiled in alarm.

Rosewarne leaned forward across the desk at him. "Listen, if it will make you feel any better, Salvini is on the run. He may have had his lot before the night's out."

Snuffy shut his eyes and appeared to commune with an inward deity. He opened them at last and blinked at Rosewarne. "This won't hurt Jimmy Madden?"

"How the hell would I know? What's it to do with him?"

Snuffy said slowly, "If it's the place I'm thinking about, Madden knows it, too. It's the first place 'e'll make for."

"You could prove that?"

"You wouldn't get me to say that in a witness box, not if Salvini was loose, but it's true enough."

Suddenly he threw caution to the winds. "'Ere's the way of it. Madden worked for the Children. 'E ran a depot for Salvini, 'andling all sorts—cars, furs, all the 'ot stuff. Then Salvini began pushing through the odd box of snow. Jimmy didn't like that and 'e said so. Then Jimmy found out where Salvini was getting it. That took a bit of doing because the wop always collected on 'is own and no one else knew the contact.

"Jimmy followed 'im one night and pinched 'im with a packet in 'is 'ands. Jimmy said 'e wouldn't have nothing to do with it, and if that was the way the Children were to be run 'e wanted out. Salvini caved in, or pretended to. Next thing you know, Jimmy was pinched on an attempted murder charge."

Chief Detective Inspector Retallack looked at Willow with supreme distaste. "You could have saved him at the trial then."

"Me and a dozen others, guv. And all we'd 'ave got out of that from Salvini would 'ave been the chop." He drew two fingers of his right hand across his throat in an expressive gesture.

Rosewarne said quietly, "Are you going to help him now or will you let him run his head into the noose?"

For a moment Snuffy looked like a terrified rabbit, then that odd dignity which Manbre had noticed the night before reasserted itself. "Can I 'ave a word with you in private, guv?"

The inspector nodded and the sergeant and Retallack went on to the landing outside the office door. Retallack glanced at Manbre. "Any ideas?"

"The inspector knows what he's doing," Manbre replied stoutly.

The chief inspector nodded curtly. "He always has in the past. I hope he doesn't take too long about it, that's all."

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As he spoke the door opened and Rosewarne hurried out. "Corner of Carnegie Street near St. Giles' Church, next door to a Greek eating-house," he barked. "Get that message over, Sergeant. All patrols to converge on the St. Giles area but to take no further action until I get there."

The office door swung wide as he spoke and Manbre, hurrying down the stairs, caught a brief glimpse of Snuffy Willow slumped in the chair behind Rosewarne's desk. He was snivelling.

A choking wall of yellow fog met the party as they left the police station. Rosewarne pulled up his coat collar, rammed his hat down on his head, and led the way at a shambling run. The pavements were made perilous by black frost. Rosewarne was the first to reach the Circus. A figure loomed out of the fog and saluted him. "We're all in position, sir."

"Good. Anything happening?"

"Not a thing, sir. The house is showing no light and nobody has gone in or out since we arrived twenty minutes ago."

"What about the Greek place?"

"Nothing there either, I'm afraid. Just a man and a girl behind the counter and a couple of scruffy types drinking. I checked them over, then came out. I have a man posted outside."

"Good enough. Have you tried the house?"

"We waited for you, sir."

"Right, I'll do that now." He beckoned to Retallack and the two men crossed the road and climbed the four cement steps which led to the front door. Rosewarne hammered on it until the echoes rang. No light shone, no steps approached along the hall within.

Rosewarne looked at his superior. "Shall we beat it in, Don?"

"If you have a warrant that says so."

Rosewarne sighed. "You win. Come on, back to the waiting game."

They rejoined the group on the other side of the road. The fog hid all movement, blanketed all sound, but Rosewarne knew that police were spaced at close intervals all the way along Carnegie Street. Silent, darkened cars blocked the approaches to St. Giles High Street, High Holborn, and the Charing Cross Road. The net was strong and closely meshed. The question remained, was there anybody in its web?

The hours passed. Now and again a policeman coughed or stamped his boots on the frosted kerb. Muted by fog the city clocks chimed eleven. The café door opened and a man appeared.

"He spun out that drink," Retallack grunted to Rosewarne.

The inspector nodded. "The word is out," he said grimly. "The Ragazzi won't budge until it's all over one way or the

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other. I'll just take a look inside the café—it'll be warm anyway."

He was halfway across the street when a light flared briefly at a window high up in the dark house on the corner. He halted as a shot rang out, and shouted over his shoulder to Retallack. "Damn it, he's in there. Go for the door, Don, break it in."

Next moment he was in the café. A glance showed him that there were no customers. The proprietor leaned with his elbows on the counter reading a newspaper, and a thin-faced blonde girl was lackadaisically wiping dishes. Rosewarne said sharply, "Where's the other one who was in here?"

The fat man behind the counter yawned hugely and turned a page of his newspaper. "Search me," he said.

Rosewarne hit the counter a blow that rattled every dish on it; the girl jumped back in fright. "Where?" he shouted.

The man said sullenly, "He had to go out the back. I don't know what you coppers think—"

Rosewarne ignored him and raced through the shop, down a narrow passage, and into a back kitchen. The door stood wide and he crashed out into the yard. Nothing there but fog.

He clambered on a coal bunker and launched himself over a timber fence, landed in soft earth, then collided with an ashcan and barked his shins on the flying lid.

A brick path led to a closed door which gave to his touch. Inside was a kitchen, the replica of the one he had just left. Retallack's men were hammering on the front door. He ran down the hall to open it. Somewhere in the building a girl screamed and Rosewarne raced for the stairs.

On the fifth-floor landing at the top of the house, light streamed from a transom above a door. Rosewarne kicked the door open and all but fell inside.

Salvini lay on his back on the floor.

The Sicilian's knees were drawn up tightly and his face wore a bewildered expression. Paula Madden knelt beside him.

She stared wild-eyed at Rosewarne. "He did it himself," she said breathlessly. "They were struggling but Salvini had the gun and it went off as they rolled on to the floor."

Rosewarne knelt down behind her and ripped open the Sicilian's coat. "There's no wound that I can see, looks more like a seizure."

"He was drunk," she began.

But Rosewarne interrupted her as the room filled with police. "Spread out," he shouted. "Search the house. He must still be here."

Salvini groaned faintly and tried to sit up. "Get me a doctor," he whimpered. "I've got to have a doctor."

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Rosewarne pushed him back on the floor. A constable came in with a couple of blankets and covered Salvini. "Good man," Rosewarne approved. To Paula he said, "Where's your brother?"

She leaned across Salvini and gripped the inspector by the shoulders. "You must listen to me," she whispered desperately. "Salvini admitted everything to me tonight before Jimmy came. He fixed the case against Jimmy. He framed him. We can re-open the case."

Rosewarne disengaged himself patiently and raised the girl to her feet. "That's all very well, young woman. But no cases are likely to be reopened while your brother is running around with a gun in his hand."

"It was Salvini's gun. Jimmy must have picked it up."

"Very likely. The point is, where did he run to?"

Paula Madden's lip began to tremble. "The roof," she faltered. "There's a skylight in the other room."

Rosewarne pushed past her and into the adjoining bedroom. Fog swirled in through the broken skylight. A bed had been pushed into the centre of the room, and a constable was hanging by his hands from the wooden framework of the skylight preparatory to hoisting himself up to the roof. Rosewarne barked at him peremptorily, "You there, come down; the man is armed."

The constable dropped to the floor and Rosewarne called back into the room where Salvini lay, "Sergeant Manbre?"

"Sir?"

"Join up with Chief Inspector Retallack. Make sure the house is completely surrounded. This place is on a corner; get ladders up on the two sides and a ladder party on the roof of the café. Keep half a dozen men in these two rooms, get the girl away. How is Salvini?"

"Seems to be coming out of it, sir. There's an ambulance due any minute."

"Good." Rosewarne turned to the two constables with him in the room. "Now then, let's give him a shout." He climbed on the bed, cupping his hands to call through the skylight. "James Madden, put your gun down and give yourself up quietly."

There was no reply. After two more attempts Rosewarne said to the uniformed men, "All right, lads, give me a leg up; I'm going mountaineering."

Rosewarne emerged on a tiny plateau surrounding the skylight —a middle-aged policeman with no head for heights. The icy fog swirled blindingly. He began to shiver dangerously. At his feet a short mansard roof slanted away at a forty-five degree angle

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to a narrow leaded gutter protected by a low stone parapet. If he began to slide down those icy slates he might very well hit the parapet with his heels and dive straight over into the street below.

He lowered himself gingerly to his haunches, planted his seat firmly on the slates, and began to slide. His progress was much slower than he had expected, and he ended up almost in a standing position with his feet safely in the gutter. He crouched down and felt over the gutter on his right-hand side. Nothing there. That placed him on the extreme corner of the house and he could move safely to his left. He straightened again and began very cautiously to move over.

After a few paces he halted, perspiration streaming down his face. He glanced back at the skylight and saw the constable's head emerge.

" Stay there," Rosewarne growled. " This parapet might not bear the two of us."

A faint breeze eddied across the roof. The fog swirled and cleared a little on the left-hand side. For an instant Rosewarne saw Madden clearly. The man was barely twelve feet away, pressed closely against the slates of the mansard roof, not moving.

Rosewarne's skin crawled tight across his cheekbones and a warning pulse began to beat insistently in his head. He called urgently to Madden, " Come down, man, before we both break our necks."

Madden's voice, desperate, almost hysterical, answered him. " Don't come closer, copper. I'll shoot."

Rosewarne's mouth was dry as dust, yet the sweat purled down inside his collar. He tried to keep talking. " Don't be a fool, Madden. There's enough harm done; you're only making it worse for yourself."

Madden laughed jerkily. " It can't be any worse. I'll swing for Salvini. One more can make no difference now."

" Salvini had a heart attack brought on by brandy and blue funk. He isn't dead and you didn't shoot him. Or at least your sister says you didn't."

The voice was weary now, all but spent. " What odds? Nobody would believe her." The revolver clicked and the hysterical voice warned him, " Don't move, d-damn you. I tell you I'll fire."

Rosewarne briefly reviewed the comforts of home, food, and firelight, and the prospects of a well-earned pension. Then he said wearily, " Let's hope you miss. I'm coming to get you, Madden." He made a slow step to the left and felt rather than saw the revolver rise up at him.

Then Madden gave a sudden sob, the revolver fell from his hand and clattered into the gutter.

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Rosewarne stood stock still for an instant. The strength went out of him and he leaned back against the mansard, sick and panting.

But the scuffle of leather on lead told him that Madden was moving again and he made what speed he could to follow. He arrived at the left overhang of the house a few steps behind Madden and saw him swaying on the brink of the chasm separating it from the flat roof of the café next door.

" Don't jump, you fool," he yelled, just as Madden launched himself across the gulf. For a moment he thought the man had landed safely, then he saw Madden's boots skid on the edge of the opposite roof and his body begin to fall past it. Madden gave a thin scream and grabbed desperately at the edge of the roof. His clutching fingers sought and found a purchase and he hung there fifty-odd feet above the street.

Rosewarne knelt down on his own side and estimated the distance between the two buildings. Five feet, no more, and since the roof of the café was a few feet lower the jump was easier. There was nothing to it if you were twenty-five years younger, kept regular hours, and could forget the drop below. At least you couldn't see it. The fog did help there.

Events seemed to be happening in slow motion. Rosewarne caught himself wondering quite dispassionately how much longer Madden could hang there by his wrenched and aching hands. Then a thin, agonised whisper reached him across the gulf. " For God's sake, man."

Rosewarne stripped off his coat and jacket, kicked his feet out of his shoes. He took a deep breath and mounted the parapet.

The next instant he was flying—a brief sensation which ended with the sting of the frosty asphalt through his socks as he landed safely on the café roof. He rolled over on his stomach and wriggled forward to seize Madden's wrists.

The convict's twisted face glared up at him.

Rosewarne snarled, " Don't pull at me, I can't hold you. Can you get a purchase with your feet on anything, a ledge, a gutter pipe? "

" Yes." The single word hissed up at him.

" All right, put as much weight on that as you dare. Don't try to climb up; you'll only have me down. We'll hang on like this till help comes."

An iron door clanged behind Rosewarne and in a matter of seconds Retallack had him by the heels. Three hefty constables grabbed Madden and hauled him on to the roof.

Rosewarne, exhausted and shivering uncontrollably, was hurried downstairs into the warmth of the café. Retallack thrust a

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mug of scalding tea between his hands. "You bloody maniac!" he said. "What's Mrs. Rosewarne going to say about this?"

"She's not going to know, that's the short answer," Rosewarne retorted sharply, and then discovered to his chagrin that his teeth were chattering too much for further speech. He drank some of the tea and burnt his tongue painfully. "I'm getting too old for this lark, Don," he murmured. "Time they gave me a desk job."

"And the rest. The girl wants to see you. Can you face it?"

Rosewarne nodded, in a moment Paula Madden was beside him. "You've had a rough passage," he told her. "How do you feel?"

She shook her head. "That's the question I should be asking you. I was such a darned fool, Mr. Rosewarne. I don't know how to thank you."

"Better not try, then," Rosewarne said sensibly. "Have you seen your brother?"

She nodded. "They've taken him away now."

"I think we may have enough to reopen the case, but he's still in plenty of trouble, your brother."

"I was wondering—do you think he might feel differently about things now?"

"Go straight, you mean?"

"Something like that, yes."

Rosewarne looked at her kindly. "I'm a police officer, my dear, not a sentimentalist, and I can't answer your question the way you want me to. My answer is that I don't know. There is a chance, that's the most anybody could say. It's up to him and, maybe, up to you."

She touched his hand lightly and was gone.

Manbre, smiling broadly, took her place. He handed Rosewarne a sizeable packet wrapped in mud-stained newspaper.

"What's this?"

"Salvini's packet."

Rosewarne's face set in a grey, implacable mask. "Snow?"

"Enough to kill half a city!"

"How did you get it?"

"Some little wharf rat we picked up skulking in one of the back rooms. He must have run in there when Madden joined the party. He made no bones about shopping Salvini; been passing the stuff to him for years. Name of Reece. He's a touch after Willow to look at."

Rosewarne nodded. "It's Snuffy's brother."

"Oh," Manbre said blankly. "So that's what he wanted to tell you in private."

"That's what he wanted to tell me. But there's more to it

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than that. Reece is James and Paula Madden's father. The kids don't know that, and they're not going to. That's part of the bargain. Snuffy brought them up. Maybe he was partly responsible for the way Jimmy turned out—kids learn by environment, but Snuffy did his best. I'm not kicking him for that."

"I'm not kicking him for anything," Manbre said quietly.

Rosewarne gave him a friendly look. "Glad to hear you say so, Jack. Snuffy kept his secret all these years. The brothers drifted apart a long time ago, but Snuffy always meant to settle with Reece. He wouldn't have done it just this way but events went against him. He must have been pretty desperate the last few days, knowing what he knew. The fact that he shopped him in the end shows how much he hated Salvini and how much he cared about the kids."

Manbre nodded. "What will happen to Snuffy now?"

"Three months maybe, for loitering with intent. He earned that and he'd feel cheated if we didn't give it to him."

"I hope Salvini gets ten years," Manbre said.

"Amen to that," Rosewarne said soberly.

Manbre brightened suddenly. "Anyway, there's one good thing. We've put paid to the Ragazzi."

Rosewarne looked at him severely. "Detective Sergeant Manbre," he said, "I am very wet and cold and miserable and you are a great deal too optimistic. Find my coat and we'll all go home."

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★ ★ ★

FEATHERED FRIENDS

On the shimmering northern tide
the swans of winter glide;
their emblem breasts gleam whiteness,
the imperial ordered brightness
of their many-seasoned sovereignty;
and, as they go, the north winds blow
the frosty feathers from their mantled wings
across the threadbare land
which clings to its diminished poverty;
bright, in the mirror of the polished rime,
in diadem, the great birds shine,
their snowy heads in dazzling flower
beneath the sun in his high tower,
who leans to catch the royal cry
of singing birds, before they die.

THEODORE NICHOLL, *The Swans*

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A PRINCE IN THE BUILDING

If you're a king you must be one—
even if they cut your head off

BY WILLIAM MAYNE

THIS is what I did. My name is Ethel March. I was younger then. I remember the time of year, it was the spring, because that was when we moved. Da knew about it before, of course, and he said, "March, March, march." He meant it was the month of March, and the second March was his own name because he was talking to himself but so that we could hear, and the third march was what we had to do, march away from our old place to a new one.

We used to have one room for all three of us, and we had to wait for a house since I was born, eleven years. Da said it was long enough, but there were worse places than our room.

He had made it very nice and my corner had striped wallpaper, and I could sit on the bed and pull down a flap from the wall to put things on, but I couldn't keep it down because it was just over my pillow, and I couldn't lie the other way because my clothes were there.

But I made a little shelf in the wall, where Da and Ma couldn't see, to put very small things in—the plastic things out of the bubble-gum machine were the right size. Sometimes in those machines you get two bubble-gums and sometimes you get one, usually one, but sometimes you get a little plastic doll or some tiny false teeth or a model of a bicycle instead, and worst of all you sometimes get two plastic things and no bubble-gum.

I dug out the little shelf with a spoon at night, and Da would think a mouse was nibbling the wood in the floor, and Ma put herself close together in case the mouse came to her. I left the wallpaper so that it made a little curtain over the shelf, and nobody saw it.

Our room was up two flights of stairs, and there were seven more rooms like it on the landing, and the stairs went up twice more, so we were halfway up.

If you went upstairs again and looked out of the windows

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there you could see mountains a long way off, and too much sky. From our window we could see the next building, which was called Chapel Place.

Our building was called Clover Hill. They were both made of bricks that were nearly shiny but not quite. In the rain they got all patchy, and they were very dirty.

Da didn't like our view much, but he said we had to be patient. I don't mind about having a view, and Ma doesn't either, but I liked to go upstairs and look at the mountains and think of going there and sitting in the sunshine like magazine people.

Inside our door Da had put a piece of wallpaper with real velvet stripes, red, and when our door was open a little bit, from outside it looked like a magazine room. Inside it was all furniture. Da said it was better to have too much, because one day we would have a house or a bigger place.

The upstairs window belonged to a boy called Mortimer. He had a brother Steven a lot older, about seventeen, and only a mother, his da wasn't there. Mortimer used to like looking at the mountains if it wasn't too smoky, because if it was you couldn't see anything much, because on one side was Chapel Place and on the other the engine shed, and that was where the smoke came from. If he couldn't see the mountains he liked to lean out and look at the engines.

One day he said, "Ethel, would you like to be a queen?"

I said I would, and wear good shoes and go about in a car.

"You might one day," he said. "Don't you tell Mamsy or Steven, but I think I'm really a prince."

Mamsy was what he called his ma. I said Steven ought to be a prince, too, but Mortimer said he wasn't really one of that family at all, but got left by accident in Clover Hill when he was a baby, to be brought up by Mamsy.

"One day I shall go and find out where I'm prince of," he said. "But if I go now the catcher will come." The catcher is the man who wants to know why you aren't at school. He doesn't come for me, but Mortimer said he used to come for Steven.

Mortimer liked to go to school, to learn everything so that he would be ready for being a prince. He often used to talk about it. He thought the mountains might be where he was prince of, because they were not in England. Steven told him that, but Mortimer didn't say anything about being a prince.

He thought I could be queen when he got to be king, and one day he gave me a sort of necklace, which was a silver chain and a blue jewel like glass hanging in the middle of it. The chain was broken near the catch so I couldn't wear it, but he said

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it was to keep secret, and it was a crown jewel, so the queen and I had got crown jewels, only she had more than me.

I kept it secret, and I put it on my little shelf with the bubble-gum things behind the wallpaper.

There wasn't anything I could do with it, so it just stayed there. Mortimer got princier than he was before. He was thin, like a prince, not fat like Steven or their mamsy. Mortimer got through the exam, and I didn't. Steven hit him all down the stairs, one flight, for boasting about it. Steven didn't pass his exam at all, and Mortimer was being too princy about it, I thought, but he was better the next day and said he had only passed it because he was a prince, which he couldn't help being.

He said he would rather have gone to Park End, where I would have to go, but it was the divine right of kings to do what they were told. We had just done divine right, so I knew what he meant. It means that if you are a king you must be one, in spite of what people say, even if they cut your head off, and that is against the law in any case.

It was about a term before we moved that I went to Park End, and Mortimer to Gough Street, which is all boys. He had some of his prince idea taken away. Sometimes he told me he wondered whether he was a prince, because the other boys were so good at things, and they oughtn't to be better than a prince.

He gave me another crown jewel, a ring with a red stone in it. He said it was a ruby, and it was part of his father's treasure, not his father in Clover Hill, who was away still, but his father a king. He wouldn't ever show me what else he had.

I put the ring with my other things, and looked at it at night, and once I washed it when Ma was out and made it cleaner. There was earth in it under the claws that held the jewel. I thought it was like an eagle's foot, and Mortimer said the eagles lived in the mountains.

Steven went away about then, like his father. Mortimer said the police asked him to go to do something for them rather secret. He didn't want to go, because he was busy. Mortimer said he had to in the end, and his mamsy was very upset about it and hoped he didn't come to any harm.

"I've got to look after her now," said Mortimer. "She's been a good mother to me. I will let her stay in the palace if she wants. Steven won't want to come."

They took down Chapel Place that term. They did it all when I was at school. When I came back they would be tidying up their shed, and the watchman would be lighting his fire. Sometimes in the morning I would see them putting chains on to

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a wall, and in the evening when I came back the wall would be gone. Ma said the noise all day was terrible, and so was the dust, and she couldn't see what they were doing, because the last wall they took down was the end one next to Clover Hill.

Then it all got bright in our room, and I could see the mountains myself, I only had to sit up in bed and there they were over the sink. But the sunlight would get in and Ma thought it would make the covers fade, but Da would take the curtain down and sit in the sun. It didn't come very often.

Chapel Place was taken away, every brick, in lorries, and there was a great big place for games, and only the watchman there on Sundays and he couldn't send us away. They put up a fence later, and the boys would climb it just the same and make it into a zoo. We got a lot more noise into the room with the wall out of the way.

Da said it would be Clover Hill next, good riddance.

One day Ma was in a state when I got back, and so was Mortimer's mamsy. The housing man had come round and told them to go on Saturday and look at new places, because it was Clover Hill next. Ma showed me how they were going to build a new Clover Hill and Chapel Place all in one, but not straight on to the buildings that had been there. When she showed me I could see the plan of it, because they had begun to build the new building, but only in the ground. They were waiting to take ours down before going any further.

Da was top pleased. He and Ma went round on Saturday first thing. They said I couldn't go and get in the way. Mortimer's mamsy went as well, but not with them. Mortimer stayed with his homework, and I went to see him, but he was too busy about some work to bother with me.

Da came back still top pleased. He said he was a moving man. Ma said she'd always lived in Clover Hill and got used to it, and what if the lifts got stuck? I wanted to live in a house with lifts in it, and Ma said in thirty years she never spent more than fifteen nights out of Clover Hill at a time.

" Go on, Ma," said Da. " It's a palace. I've been all over the world, and I can tell." He used to be a soldier once, so he had seen a lot of places.

Ma said she was bound to go, and Da got even toppier, and we went to the pictures, and on Sunday we walked right across the town and looked at the new place. It was a much bigger building than Clover Hill, and the bricks were not at all shiny, and it didn't look patchy, though it rained a bit when we got there.

Da and Ma couldn't remember which windows we were going to have. There were a lot of them, anyway, and they looked out

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three ways, north, south, and west, and Da said he could lie in bed all Sunday and look at the mountains, but I couldn't see them from the ground. There were trees round the building.

" Six rooms," said Da. " Seventeen windows. Hot and cold water, too."

Ma liked that, because she'd only used a hot tap twice, but I knew them at school. She liked the windows, too, because she wanted to make curtains for them. We had to go in three weeks' time, in March. The building wasn't quite finished. They had done all the outside, but the inside hadn't been finished.

Mortimer's mamsy had chosen a different place. She wanted to live on the ground, and there wasn't a ground place in this building. Its address was Hastings Court, and there were other battles near, all in the same grass enclosure.

We went back by bus, and Ma felt better when she'd had a cup of tea. She didn't know what it would be like to have six rooms. The new place was as big as all our landing put together.

Da said the bathroom was as big as our room, nearly, and we wouldn't have to share. That was a good thing, because I wouldn't have to wait until I got to school any more.

On Monday Da went round to the removal people and arranged for them to come on the proper day, a Tuesday.

Other people began to go before we did, because their places were ready. They weren't all going to Hastings Court, though. Some were going to other battles, and some to other kinds of places. Some old people who hardly ever went out because of the stairs went to some littler places than ours, with lifts just the same, and they all liked it, even Ma, when she saw them all going. She had only seen the new place with nobody in it, and she liked people round about.

Da told her there would be plenty in Hastings Court, and she began to like the idea a lot. She would rather do without taps than without people, and she didn't mind about the view, and she could put curtains up to stop the fading sun.

Mortimer and his mamsy were going to a place called Abbey Stand. He said there was a wood near it. They were going to have the removal van straight after us. Da had arranged that, too, to help them. We were going to be the last people out of our staircase, and it got quieter and quieter, until we knew in the end that the person walking past could only be Mortimer, because no one else came now.

Da thought we ought to practise living in more rooms than one, seeing that all the others were empty, but Ma wouldn't let him. I would have liked to practise too, but Ma said wait until we had our own front door.

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Mortimer said, one day, that he didn't know whether I would be queen after all. I didn't mind, because it would be two days to the moving one. He thought the king that was his father might come back and look for him in Clover Hill, and find it wasn't there any more, but I thought that Mortimer could go and look for the kingdom by then, and save the king the trouble.

When you move you can have the morning off. It often happened to people at Park End. Sometimes they moved in the afternoon and had that off instead. The van came early, and Da was still all white shaving lather, but the man said he wasn't going to take the sink, so carry on, and Da did; and Ma packed away his towel all damp, and Da put on his tie to give a hand, and in no time all our room was in the van.

Da and Ma got in the cab with the driver, and I got in the back and sat on the carpet. The tacks were sticking out still, but I got between them, and we went away. If you go in the back of a van things seem to follow you, and Clover Hill stayed with my eyes for a long time, until I found it had got smaller while I looked at it, and there were other things to see.

The new place was big, but not so big as our classroom. I thought it would be, but I was glad it wasn't or our furniture would never have been seen for space.

"Those windows want a rub up," said Ma, and began it straight away, using the hot tap in the kitchen as if she'd always had one, turning on easily and getting the water.

Da went back with the man to help Mortimer and his mamsy, and Ma and I sorted ourselves out. I had a room to myself, and I could sit in it all alone on the bed or on the floor, but Da would buy me a chair one day, Ma said.

Da had only half a morning off, so we didn't see him until the evening. He came in and walked about and said he couldn't believe it, and Ma said they were nice people next door, and they had a dog. Da said, "Ah," and we said we had to have a dog, and Da agreed, but we couldn't have one yet.

So I went to bed for the first time, and I woke up early, and I wanted to look at the crown jewels, and I wondered how Mortimer was going on, but there was no little shelf of jewels and plastic things from the bubble-gum. I had quite forgotten to bring them with me, and they were still behind the wallpaper, and Mortimer would think it was awful not to have them.

We didn't know where to have breakfast, there were so many rooms, and we had it in the kitchen in the end, because we still only had one table and it was there. Then I went off, and I had to go a new way to Park End, by bus, and there was a mist near all the battle-buildings, and hundreds of sunrises in the windows.

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I came back a different way, and when I got to Clover Hill, because I was going there to get the crown jewels, they were beginning to take it down, but I dodged round and went up our old staircase. There was light in it because the roof had begun to be off that very day.

I went up to our room, and got the crown jewels and the plastic things, and just as I came out again somebody came running down from upstairs. I was going back into our room, but I saw it was Steven, Mortimer's brother, and somebody following him, running downstairs.

" Hey, Ethel," said Steven, speaking quietly, although he said Hey, " you keep this and give it to Mortimer. I'm off."

He had given me a very bright thing, all made of jewels, white ones, like diamonds. It was a sort of crown, only it didn't join at the back. I looked at it for a moment, and then I put it behind me, because a man had run downstairs.

" Where's he gone? " he said, and then ran on downstairs himself, because he seemed to have heard Steven go right down. I went after him, and there were men holding Steven, and one was saying that there was nothing there but they'd look again.

I thought they must be after the crown, so I put it under my coat, but it bulged, so I put it on my leg and held it through my skirt, and walked past. The crown was cold, and it was dreadful in the bus, but all right in the lift. I'm glad it wasn't stairs.

The next day I wrapped it up because it must be Mortimer's, not mine, and took it to his house after school. He said it was his crown and that was how he proved he was a prince, and put it away in a box. I haven't seen him since.

Ma told me the other day, now I'm older, what it was all about. Mortimer's father had all the jewels from another man who had really stolen them, and Mortimer's father got into trouble for it, but no one knew where the jewels were.

Steven got into trouble because he found them and tried to sell one. When he heard that Clover Hill was being taken down he came back to hide the rest away, and they caught him, but I had the jewels. The ones that Mortimer gave me were the same lot; and I've still kept them. After all, Mortimer was a prince and they were his jewels.

We have got a dog. Da called him Prince, and I agreed.

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BE IT NEVER SO HUMBLE

Home is where you hang your head.

GROUCHO MARX

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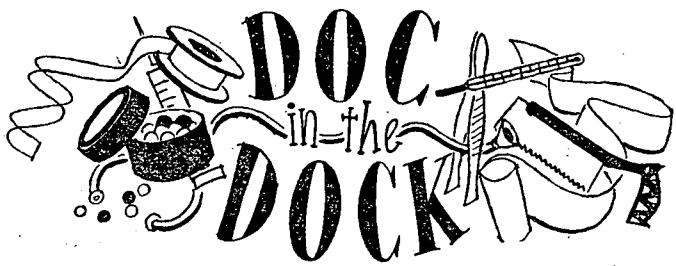

Throw physic to the dogs; I'll none of it

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Macbeth*

Therapeutic,
Elephantic,
Diagnosis,
Boom!
Pancreatic,
Microstatic,
Anti-toxic,
Doom!
With a normal catabolism,
Gabbleism and babbleism,
Snip, Snap, Snorum,
Cut out his abdonorum,
Dyspepsia,
Anaemia,
Toxaemia.
One, two, three,
And out goes He,
With a fol-de-rol-derido for the Five Guinea Fee.

T. H. WHITE, *The Sword in the Stone*

With a Grain of Salt

Mr. Holloman smiled genially. " We use nothing but simple, wholesome ingredients. Phenol—" he indicated a large, stoppered jar full of a pinkish disinfectant—" and sodium chloride." This was a cardboard box.

" Looks just like salt," said Sammy.

" I shouldn't wonder if you were right," said Mr. Holloman. " Our standard gargle and throat-spray, two shillings and sixpence the bottle, contains one measure of phenol solution—measure it out in that little glass jar—to four measures of sodium

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chloride. You can use a tablespoon for that. The rest is aqua pura."

"Where do I get that?"

"Out of the tap."

"Do you mean you can sell that stuff for half a dollar a bottle?"

"It is often difficult to meet the demand for it."

"Cor," said Sammy. His respect for Mr. Holloman increased.

MICHAEL GILBERT, *Fear to Tread*

Call to Mind

Shrinker Man, Shrinker Man, put me straight if you can,
Free me of my ticks and twitches,
Disconnect my latent switches,
Shrinker Man!

Shrinker Man, Shrinker Man, wise me up if you can.
Air my problems and excuse me,
Sympathise and unconfuse me,
Shrinker Man!

I've been on one of those complex tours,
I want you to make my problems yours,
Now give me one of 'em cut-rate cures—
Shrinker Man!

BUD FREEMAN, *Shrinker Man*

Grave Matter

Tell the patient that, with God's help, you hope to cure him, but inform the relatives that the case is grave. Then, if he dies, you will have safeguarded yourself. If he recovers, it will be a testimony to your skill and wisdom. When asked how long recovery will take, specify double the expected period. A quicker recovery will redound to your credit, whereas if a patient finds the cure taking longer than prophesied, he will lose faith in your skill. If he asks why the cure was so swift, tell him he was strong-hearted and had good healing flesh; he will then be proud and delighted.

E. S. TURNER, *Call the Doctor*

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Cutting it Fine

" Nothing like dissecting, to give one an appetite," said Mr. Bob Sawyer, looking round the table.

Mr. Pickwick slightly shuddered. " By the bye, Bob," said Mr. Allen, " have you finished that leg yet? "

" Nearly," replied Sawyer, helping himself to half a fowl as he spoke. " It's a very muscular one for a child."

" Is it? " inquired Mr. Allen, carelessly.

" Very," said Bob Sawyer, with his mouth full.

" I've put my name down for an arm, at our place," said Mr. Allen. " We're clubbing for a subject, and the list is nearly full, only we can't get hold of any fellow that wants a head. I wish you'd take it."

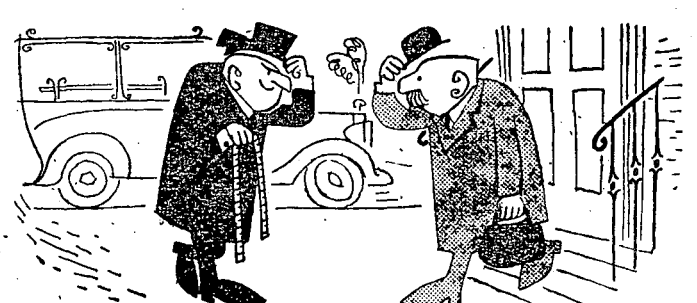
" No," replied Bob Sawyer, " can't afford expensive luxuries."

CHARLES DICKENS, *The Pickwick Papers*

Cold Comfort

Christopher Robin
Had wheezles
And sneezles,
They bundled him
Into
His bed.
They gave him what goes
With a cold in the nose,
And some more for a cold
In the head . . .
They sent for some doctors
In sneezles
And wheezles
To tell them what ought
To be done.
All sorts and conditions
Of famous physicians
Came hurrying round
At a run.
They all made a note
Of the state of his throat,
They asked if he suffered from thirst;
They asked if the sneezles
Came after the wheezles,
Or if the first sneezle
Came first . . .

A. A. MILNE, *Now We Are Six*



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★ *Whoop it up, Irish-wise in Heber Finn's pub! With more than a touch of blarney, Bradbury describes yet another outrageous incident that befell when he was filming in Ireland.*

WILD IN GALWAY

BY RAY BRADBURY

WE were far out at the tip of Ireland, in Galway, where the weather strikes from its bleak quarters in the Atlantic with sheets of rain and gusts of cold and still more sheets of rain. You go to bed sad and wake in the middle of the night thinking you heard someone cry, thinking you yourself were weeping, and feel your face and find it dry. Then you look at the window and turn over, sadder still, and fumble about for your dripping sleep and try to get it back on.

We were out, as I said, in Galway, which is grey stone with green beards on it, a rock town, and the sea coming in and the rain falling down; and we had been there a month solid working with our film director on a script which was, with immense irony, to be shot in the warm yellow sun of Mexico some time in January. The pages of the script were full of fiery bulls and hot tropical flowers and burning eyes, and I typed it with chopped-off frozen fingers in my grey hotel room where the food was criminal's gruel and the weather a beast at the window.

On the thirty-first night, a knock at the door, at seven. The door opened, my film director stepped nervously in.

"Let's get the hell out and find some wild life in Ireland and forget this damn rain," he said, all in a rush.

"What rain?" I said, sucking my fingers to get the ice out. "The concussion here under the roof is so steady I'm shell-shocked and have quite forgot the stuff's coming down!"

"Four weeks here and you're talking Irish," said the director.

"Hand me my clay pipe," I said. And we ran from the room.

"Where?" said I.

"Heber Finn's pub," said he.

And we blew along the stony street in the dark that rocked gently as a boat on the black flood because of the tilty-dancing streetlights above which made the shadows tear and fly, uneasy.

Then, sweating rain, faces pearled, we struck through the

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pub doors, and it was warm as a sheepfold because there were the townsmen pressed in a great compost heap at the bar and Heber Finn yelling jokes and foaming up drinks.

"Heber Finn," cried the director, "we're here for a wild night!"

"A wild night we'll make it," said Heber Finn, and in a moment a slug of poteen was burning lace patterns in our stomachs, to let new light in.

I exhaled fire. "That's a start," I said.

We had another and listened to the rollicking jests and the jokes that were less than half clean, or so we guessed, for the brogue made it difficult, and the whisky poured on the brogue and thus combined made it double-difficult. But we knew when to laugh, because when a joke was finished the men hit their knees and then hit us. They'd give their limbs a great smack and then bang us on the arm or thump us in the chest.

As our breath exploded, we'd shape the explosion to hilarity and squeeze our eyes tight. Tears ran down our cheeks not from joy but from the exquisite torture of the drink scalding our throats. Thus pressed like shy flowers in a huge warm-mouldy book, the director and I lingered on, waiting for some vast event.

At last my director's patience thinned. "Heber Finn," he called across the seethe, "it's been wild so far, all right, but we want it wilder, I mean, the biggest night Ireland ever saw!"

Whereupon Heber Finn whipped off his apron, shrugged his meat-cleaver shoulders into a tweed coat, jumped up in the air, slid down inside his raincoat, slung on his beardy cap, and thrust us at the door.

"Nail everything down till I get back," he advised his crew. "I'm taking these gents to the damnedest evening ever. Little do they know what waits for them out there."

He opened the door and pointed. The wind threw half a ton of ice-water on him. Taking this as no more than an additional spur to rhetoric, Heber Finn, not wiping his face, added in a roar, "Out with you! On! Here we go!"

"Do you think we should?" I said, doubtful now that things seemed really on the move.

"What do you mean?" cried the director. "What do you want to do? Go freeze in your room? Rewrite that scene you did so lousily today?"

"No, no," I said, and slung on my own cap.

I was first outside thinking, I've a wife and three loud but lovely children, what am I doing here, eight thousand miles gone from them, on the dark side of God's remembrance? Do I *really* want to do this?

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Then, like Ahab, I thought on my bed, a damp box with its pale cool winding-sheets and the window dripping next to it like a conscience all night through. I groaned. I opened the door of Heber Finn's car, took my legs apart to get in, and we shot down the town like a ball in a bowling alley.

Heber Finn at the wheel talked fierce, half hilarity, half sobering King Lear.

"A wild night, is it? You'll have the grandest night ever," he said. "You'd never guess, would you, to walk through Ireland, so much could go on under the skin?"

"I knew there must be an outlet somewhere," I yelled.

The speedometer was up to fifty miles an hour. Stone walls raced by on the right, stone walls raced by on the left. It was raining the entire dark sky down on the entire dark land.

"Outlet indeed!" said Heber Finn. "If the Church knew, but it don't! Or then maybe it does, but figures—the poor craythurs—and lets us be!"

"Where, what—?"

"You'll see!" said Heber Finn.

The speedometer read sixty. My stomach was stone like the stone walls rushing left and right. Does the car have brakes? I wondered. Death on an Irish road, I thought, a wreck, and before anyone found us strewn we'd melt away in the pounding rain and be part of the turf by morn. What's death anyway? Better than hotel food.

"Can't we go a bit faster?" I asked.

"It's done," said Heber Finn, and made it seventy.

"That will do it, nicely," I said in a faint voice, wondering what lay ahead. Behind all the slate-stone weeping walls of Ireland, what happened? Beneath the rain-drenched sod, the flinty rock, at the numbed core of living, was there one small seed of fire which, fanned, might break volcanoes free and boil the rains to steam?

Was there then somewhere a Baghdad harem, nests awriggle and aslither with silk and tassel the absolutely perfect tint of women unadorned? Somewhere in this drizzling land were there hearth-fleshed peach-fuzz Renoir ladies bright as lamps you could hold your hands out to and warm your palms? We passed a church. No. We passed a convent. No. We passed a village slouched under its old men's thatch. No. Stone walls to left. Stone walls to right. No. Yet . . .

I glanced over at Heber Finn. We could have switched off our lights and driven by the steady piercing beams of his forward-directed eyes snatching at the dark, flicking away the rain.

Wife, I thought to myself, children, forgive me for what I do

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this night, terrible as it might be, for this is Ireland in the rain of an ungodly time and way out in Galway where the dead must go to die.

The brakes were hit. We slid a good ninety feet, my nose mashed on the windscreen. Heber Finn was out of the car.

"We're here." He sounded like a man drowning deep in the rain.

I looked left. Stone walls. I looked right. Stone walls.

"Where is it?" I shouted.

"Where, indeed." He pointed, mysteriously. "There."

I saw a hole in the wall, a tiny gate flung wide.

The director and I followed at a plunge. We saw other cars in the dark now, and many bikes. But not a light anywhere. A secret, I thought, oh, it *must* be wild to be *this* secret. What am I doing here? I yanked my cap lower. Rain crawled down my neck.

Through the hole in the wall we stumbled, Heber Finn clenching our elbows. "Here," he husked, "stand here. It'll be a moment. Swig on this to keep your blood high."

I felt a flask knock my fingers. I got the fire into my boilers and let the steam up the flues.

"It's a lovely rain," I said.

"The man's mad," said Heber Finn, and drank after the director, a shadow among shadows in the dark.

I squinted about. I had an impression of a midnight sea upon which men like little boats passed on the murmurous tides. Heads down, muttering, in twos and threes, a hundred men stirred out beyond.

It has an unholy air—Good God, what's it all about? I asked myself, incredibly curious now.

"Heber Finn—?" said the director.

"Wait," whispered Heber Finn. "This is *it*!"

What did I expect? Perhaps some scene like those old movies where innocent sailing ships suddenly flap down cabin walls and guns appear like magic to fire on the foe. Or a farmhouse falls apart like a cereal box, Long Tom rears up to blast a projectile five hundred miles to target Paris.

So here, maybe, I thought, the stones will spill away each from the others, the walls of that house will curtain back, rosy lights will flash forth, and from a monstrous cannon six, a dozen, ten dozen pink pearly women, not dwarf-Irish but willowy-French, will be shot out over the heads and down into the waving arms of the grateful multitude. Benison indeed! What's more—manna!

The lights came on. I blinked.

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For I saw the entire unholy thing. There it was, laid out for me under the drizzling rain.

The lights came on. The men quickened, turned, gathered, us with them.

A mechanical rabbit popped out of a little box at the far end of the stony yard and ran. Eight dogs, let free from gates, yelping, ran after in a great circle. There was not one shout or murmur from the crowd of men. Their heads turned slowly, watching.

The rain rained down on the illuminated scene. The rain fell upon tweed caps and thin cloth coats. The rain dripped off thick eyebrows and thin noses. The rain beat on hunched shoulders. I stared. The rabbit ran. The dogs ran. At the finish, the rabbit popped into its electric hatch. The dogs collided into each other, barking. The lights went out.

In the dark, I turned to stare at the director as I knew he must be turning to stare at me.

I was thankful for the dark, the rain, so Heber Finn could not see our faces.

" Come on, now," he shouted, " place your bets! "

We were back in Galway, speeding, at ten o'clock. The rain was still raining, the wind was still blowing. The highway was a river working to erase the stone beneath as we drew up in a great tidal spray before my hotel.

" Well, now," said Heber Finn, not looking at us, but at the windscreen wiper beating, palpitating there. " Well."

The director and I had bet on five races and had lost between us two or three pounds. It worried Heber Finn.

" I won a great deal," he said, " and some of it I put down in your names. That last race, I swear to God, I bet and won for all of us. Let me pay you."

" No, Heber Finn, thanks," I said, my numb lips moving.

He took my hand and pressed two shillings into it. I didn't fight him. " That's better," he said.

Wringing out his cap in the hotel lobby my director looked at me and said, " It was a wild Irish night, wasn't it? "

" A wild night," I said. He left.

I hated to go up to my room. So I sat for another hour in the reading lounge of the damp hotel and took the traveller's privilege, a glass and a bottle provided by the dazed hall porter.

I sat alone, listening to the rain and the rain on the cold hotel roof, thinking of Ahab's coffin-bed waiting for me up there under the drumbeat weather.

I thought of the only warm thing in the hotel, in the town, in all the land of Eire this night, the script in my typewriter this

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moment, with its sun of Mexico, its hot winds blowing from the Pacific, its mellow papayas, its yellow lemons, its fiery sand, and its women with dark charcoal-burning eyes.

And I thought of the darkness beyond the town, the light flashing on, the electric rabbit running, the dogs running, and the rabbit gone, and the light going out, and the rain falling down on the dank shoulders and the soaked caps, and trickling off the noses and seeping through the tweeds.

Going upstairs I glanced through a streaming window. There, riding by under a streetlight, was a man on a bicycle. He was terribly drunk, for the bike weaved back and forth across the road. He kept pumping on unsteadily, blearily. I watched him ride off into the raining dark.

Then I went on up to die in my room. © Ray Bradbury 1959

★ ★ ★

SHOW A LEG

Are you a fresh, bright, early riser? Do you leap out of bed brisk as a bluejacket, mind fully alert? If so, see how many of these you can solve before breakfast. If you are the other kind—why, then, do them in bed. Either way, you'll find the answers on page 105

1. *How many: a. miles to Babylon? b. drams in an ounce? c. legs on a one-legged centipede? d. keys on a piano?*
2. *What is Post-and-Rails Tea?*
3. *Distinguish between:*
   - *a. The Beaufort Scale and the Burnham scales;*
   - *b. Leda and Lauder;*
   - *c. Urim and Thummim.*
4. *From what localities do these phrases originate:*
   - *a. Beyond the pale;*
   - *b. Crossing the Rubicon;*
   - *c. Over the water to Charlie?*
5. *Who wrote: a. Justice;*
   - *b. Justine;*
   - *c. Just You Wait;*
   - *d. Carrots Just a Little Boy;*
   - *e. The Four Just Men?*
6. *Who ate these memorable meals:*
   - *a. Ham sandwiches and hay;*
   - *b. A haporth of bread and an intolerable deal of sack;*
   - *c. A loaf of bread, a jug of wine;*
   - *d. A mess of pottage?*

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OFF THE BEETON TRACK

Brides always burn the first pan of potatoes

BY L. S. HOWARTH

WHEN I met Foster unexpectedly at lunch the other day, the first thing I did was to ask after his wife. This was natural enough. After all, I had been his best man, and everyone knew that his wife, Louise, was Foster's most interesting feature. She was radiantly beautiful and had made such an arresting bride that even the old bishop who performed the ceremony seemed somewhat reluctant to be passing her on to someone else.

In the circumstances, you would have thought that the mere mention of Louise would have been enough to light Foster's face with joy. On this occasion, however, it didn't. Instead, he looked like a man just reminded of a painful appointment at the dentist's.

"You hadn't heard?" he asked.

I told him that for the last two years I had been in Tanganyika.

"Of course." He nodded sadly. It was incredible that such a dismal expression could emanate from the chef's special at the Running Tortoise, which represents just about the finest plateful of nourishment, at a fantastically low price, to be found anywhere in the civilised world.

"Louise," I inquired with concern, "is—all right?"

"Perfectly healthy," he said shortly. Then, suddenly, "Look, old boy, can you cast your mind back to the wedding?"

"I shall never forget it." I sighed wistfully. "Such a beauty! Heavens, Foster, you were a lucky devil to get her."

"That's what everybody said. You'd have thought I'd won her in a lottery. You'd be amazed how many different polite ways there are of telling a chap he's not good enough for his wife. I heard them all.

"But I put up with it. I had got Louise, after all, and we were both perfectly happy about it. We had our honeymoon in San Remo—perhaps you remember?"

I said I did. Louise had sent me a postcard, and even though

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she spelt " wonderful " wrongly I still treasured it among my souvenirs.

" I don't suppose I need go into that honeymoon." He stopped to sigh over his soufflé as if it was the most proletarian of teashop tapioca. " It was everything a honeymoon should be: sun, romance—"

" You need not," I said kindly, " get yourself bogged down in embarrassing detail."

" I don't propose to. Let's cut," Foster suggested, " to our return home, to our little flat, our love-nest. Cut further, if you don't mind, to the moment when I returned home at six-thirty the following evening, after my first day at the office as a married man."

" The moment," I suggested, " when Louise dished up for you the first meal she had ever concocted with her own fair hand? "

" That very moment."

" It must have been wonderful," I said.

" It was excruciating! " Foster's voice was so forceful that customers halfway across the room looked round at us, and a waiter set himself ready to sprint for the police.

" Now, come! " I said. " Everybody knows that brides always burn the first pan of potatoes. It's almost a good-luck charm."

" But she hadn't," Foster said sombrely, and went on to tell his story.

Everything had gone just as she planned: the watery soup that tasted like sour varnish; the leathery beef; the inspissated Yorkshire pudding; the mangled, dripping corpse of a good cabbage; the obscene travesty of a rice pudding. I tell you, if you'd only dreamt of that meal you'd have been found in your bed in the morning dead of fright! But I had to eat it.

I was wondering how to offer a few words of criticism that would not upset her when she changed my problem completely. " There," she said, " you didn't know I was such a good cook, did you? A lovely dinner for you just like mother made! "

I examined her face very closely. But there wasn't a muscle moving. She was as deadly serious as a judge with the black cap on. She really thought she had cooked a first-class meal. It really had been just like her mother had made. It was my fault that I had never checked up on her mother's cuisine.

It was one of those solemn moments, old boy, that come to you rarely in life, when you are stopped dead in your tracks by some appalling, inescapable truth. In that moment, I knew I had sworn myself for life to a woman who couldn't cook. Worse: I was tied to a woman who couldn't cook but thought she could.

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I said nothing at the time. I wanted to think. And the more I thought, the farther I seemed to be from a solution. In every other way, you see, Louise was still a perfect wife: enchanting, devoted, sympathetic, faithful. Anything you can think of to describe a wife who is all she can be. But her cooking grew no better, and the slightest hint from me that it was anything short of cordon bleu standards was enough to upset her for the evening.

I could make your blood run cold, old boy, if I told you of some of the meals I had to eat. The worst of all were the suet puddings made from a recipe handed down on the distaff side of her family for generations.

Luckily, I was able to have lunch in town, so I was guaranteed one reasonable meal a day. I worked at the office like something out of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, trying to get promotion so that I could afford to provide my wife with a servant who might, I hoped, eventually be entrusted with the cooking.

I was on the right track, too. My boss, a man called Brooks, had dropped some pretty broad hints, and the night Louise shattered me I was feeling fairly confident.

"Darling," she said, as we drank our awful coffee after our dreadful meal, "you'd never guess."

I kissed her and invited her to tell me.

"I ran into Mrs. Brooks while I was shopping in Oxford Street today. I know how anxious you are to get promotion, and I did so want to help you, so do you know what I did?"

"I'm sure," I said, "it was something very clever."

"I think so," Louise said brightly. "I persuaded her to promise to bring Mr. Brooks along for dinner next Wednesday."

I was aghast. I thought as fast as I could. "It's too big a job for you to tackle alone," I said hastily. "We must get some professional caterers in. They provide everything—"

"And what's a housewife," Louise asked archly, "if she isn't a professional caterer? Of course I can manage a simple dinner for four people!"

The best I could do was to ensure that at least there would be no suet pudding. I tried praying, also, that one of the Brooks would develop some slight disorder which would prevent their coming. But their health prevailed over my luck. They came.

The dinner, old boy? I won't describe it. There were three courses before the coffee, and with each one a strange expression deepened on Brooks' face. It took me some time to make it out, and it was only as I was skirmishing with my meringue pie—at least, that's what Louise said it was—that I recognised it. It was the expression of a man who is convinced he has been exposed to the lowest and most despicable form of practical joke.

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"Well," Louise said brightly when they'd gone, "aren't you going to congratulate me?"

This time I really had to say something. "You didn't think," I said, "that it wasn't altogether your most successful meal?"

The storm cones were hoisted. "Are you suggesting—?"

"Darling," I said firmly, "I am judging your cooking as all artists like their work to be judged, by your own high standards. By those—you have done better."

"Well, I suppose you're entitled to your opinion. I thought it was very nice. When you get your promotion, you'll see how right I was."

She was, of course, wrong.

I didn't get my promotion; indeed, I was lucky to escape being sent off to manage the Aberdeen branch. When I told Louise, she took the news very quietly, but the following week it had a startling result.

"Would you mind," she asked me one evening, "if I went to the Technical College for two half-days a week?"

"Why on earth," I asked, "do you want to go the the Technical College?"

"It has struck me," Louise said, "that you aren't always entirely satisfied with my cooking. So I would like to take some cookery lessons to find out what it is about my food that you don't enjoy. It may be quite a small thing, really. And after all," she smiled demurely, "the way to a man's heart is through his stomach."

"One way," I said. "But there are some wonderful bypasses, too, and you know all those."

I didn't expect a great deal of those cookery classes. Nothing, I was sure, could eradicate that grim family tradition. I looked forward, none the less, to hearing her first progress report.

"The teacher," she told me excitedly, "is a real chef called Monsieur Durand, and he gave us simply marvellous tips. Why do you know, when he boils potatoes he always puts a teaspoonful of salt into the water!"

"No!" I exclaimed.

"These professional cooks," Louise said earnestly, "must be absolutely bursting with little wrinkles like that. I can hardly wait for my next lesson."

Well, old boy, revelation piled itself up on revelation. Before she'd been there a week, she'd discovered that if you boil an egg for less than three minutes it stays soft inside, and that you usually get better results by grilling a chop on *both* sides. Slowly, as she incorporated these momentous discoveries into our domestic menus, the food improved. Each week something was a little

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better, and after she'd been at the college for a term we had a decent meal in the evenings as often as not.

By the end of the second term she was making great strides. Her mother's methods were quite obsolete, and I found myself looking forward eagerly to my meal at home. So much so, in fact, that I made a daring suggestion to Louise.

"Suppose," I said, "we ask the boss to dinner? It may do some good."

By now, I'd left Brooks because I couldn't stand his continual reproachful stare, and I was working for a very decent chap called Palmer. Louise agreed and Palmer and his wife accepted our invitation.

How different, old boy! How different from that other fiasco! She had chosen the menu perfectly, and every item was cooked to perfection. Only six months before I should never have believed it possible.

What with the food, and Louise looking lovelier than ever, Palmer behaved like a man who had wandered into some sort of Hollywood Arabian Nights fantasy.

When he left he thanked us as warmly as if we'd given him the title deeds to the Bank of England.

"A beautiful dinner, darling!" I told Louise enthusiastically, "really superb!"

"You didn't think," she asked anxiously, "that the Crêpes Suzette were the least bit woolly?"

"Good gracious, no!" They had been perfect.

Well, apparently Palmer didn't think the Crêpes Suzette were woolly either, because three days later he suggested most cordially that I might like to go into the firm with him as a partner. It would make it easier, he said, for us to have a lot more delightful social evenings together.

Naturally, I accepted on the spot and hurried home to tell Louise all about it.

There had been some mention, too, of an exciting new goulash for dinner, and I arrived home all agog.

Foster stopped again. He contemplated his coffee spoon mournfully for a couple of minutes before going on.

"She wasn't there," he said eventually. "Just not there."

"Not there?" I repeated.

"There was a note instead. A note to say that she was leaving me."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed.

"Leaving me," Foster went on, remorselessly punishing himself, "for none other than this Durand who had been her

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cookery teacher. Now that she was really proficient, she said in her note, she was looking forward to being able to help him in his restaurant."

He paused pointedly, and then he added heavily, "*This* restaurant, old boy!"

"Good heavens!" I said again.

"I have to come here," he said, "to enjoy her cooking."

"The best in London," I said, awestruck.

He nodded agreement and laid his hand on the back of mine. "Old boy," he said, "if ever you get married—don't expect your wife to be perfect in *everything*!"

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ALIMENTARY, MY DEAR WATSON

To eat is human; to digest divine

C. T. COPELAND

★ ★ ★

SOLUTIONS to SHOW A LEG

on page 98

1. *a. Three score and ten; b.* 16*; c. one; d.* 89*, counting the one you lock it with.*
2. *Tea full of floating tea-leaves.*
3. *a. Scale of wind forces and pay grades for teachers;*
   b. Ancient Greek nymph and modern Scottish comic;
   c. Both are objects of ancient Hebrew worship.
4. *a. Ireland; b. Ancient Rome; c. Scotland.*
5. *a. Galsworthy; b. Lawrence Durrell; c. Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe—it's from My Fair Lady; d. Mrs. Ewing; e. Edgar Wallace.*
6. *a. The White King; b. Falstaff; c. Omar Khayyam and Thou; d. Esau.*

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD

on page 144

Across. 1, *Complimentary*. 8, *Rotor*. 9, *Addle*. 11, *Streets*. 12, *Eleven*. 16, *Sypher*. 18, *Aggregation*. 19, *Adhere*. 22, *Rodent*. 27, *Garland*. 28, *Error*. 29, *I fain*. 30, *Photographers*.
Down. 2, *Octave*. 3, *Pursue*. 4, *Ivory*. 5, *Enter*. 6, *Trashy*. 7, *Radish*. 8, *Remembrance*. 10, *Extradition*. 13, *Vague*. 14, *Nerve*. 15, *Sighs*. 16, *Satyr*. 17, *Proud*. 20, *Hearth*. 21, *Regret*. 23, *Oldish*. 24, *Eclair*. 25, *Wring*. 26, *Mania*.

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I had liked Simon Lester, the English schoolmaster, from that first moment when he came to my rescue, backing the big hired car for me: the Athens car hired by "Monsieur Simon's girl" for Monsieur Simon of Delphi—whom we could not trace. In Athens, they had brought me the car by mistake, thinking that I, Camilla Haven (eager to get to Delphi, and short of cash) was the hirer.

Simon Lester was at Delphi to find out the true facts about his brother Michael, a British Liaison Officer killed on Parnassus in 1944. I, too, became deeply concerned with him in his quest as we learnt from the old shepherd Stephanos of Michael's murder at the hands of guerilla-leader Angelos Dragoumis.

Simon found a room for me in the studio at Delphi where he and Nigel, the young artist, were staying. And now we had been joined by Danielle—glamorous, malevolent—adored by Nigel, but with eyes only for Simon in spite of his apparent rebuffs. With a shock of outrage I had heard her claiming to be "Simon's girl." This I refused to believe until my own eyes showed me that Simon's was the tall figure at the door of Danielle's room . . .

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My Brother Michael

By MARY STEWART

IT WAS Simon standing outside Danielle's room.

If I had been in a condition to think, the swift and complete rebellion of every nerve and muscle in my body, and of every drop of blood in my brain, would have told me finally about myself and Simon.

Simon moved on and pushed open Nigel's door. I saw him reach up for the light-switch but as he moved the beam of a powerful torch speared out of the darkness of the room to catch him full on the face and chest. I saw his fractional check and recoil, as if the light was a physical blow in the eyes, but the pause was less than momentary, no more than the tensing before the spring.

He launched himself forward along the beam of light with the speed of a bullet. I heard an impact, a curse, the swift stamp and flurry of feet on the stone floor, then hell seemed to break loose.

I ran down the corridor and paused in the doorway. The room was a pandemonium of violently struggling bodies. In the weaving, flashing torch beam the two men looked enormous, and their shadows towered and waved grotesquely over ceiling and walls.

Simon had the other's wrist in one hand, struggling to twist the man's arm so that the torch would light his features. The beam swung wildly, erratically, as the other fought to resist him, the light sweeping in broken arcs through the darkness. It caught me, standing in the doorway, and raked a brilliant curve across my feet and the skirt of the nightdress below my coat.

Someone snarled something incomprehensible in Greek, and then the man wrenched his arm free from Simon's grip and, with a grunt of effort, brought the heavy torch down in a vicious blow aimed for Simon's head. Simon jerked aside, so that the torch came down with a sickening sound on the side of his neck. It must have struck a muscle, for his grip seemed to loosen and the Greek tore free.

I knew an instant of almost hysterical relief—it was not only

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that Simon had managed to evade the blow: I had just seen something that mattered so desperately to me that I scarcely dared acknowledge even to myself how important it was—*Simon's assailant was Dimitrios.* It was Dimitrios who had been in Danielle's room: her lover Dimitrios—who had threatened me on the cliff edge above Delphi. Those jealous suspicions of mine, when I had seen Simon outside her door, were without foundation. She was not Simon's girl.

I saw the Greek's stocky body and broad shoulders in the erratic light before Simon was on him again, and the torch flew wide to strike the wall beside me and fall. Darkness stamped down.

I had no time to wonder about Dimitrios—why he had gone to Nigel's room, or why Nigel himself didn't appear to be here, before the two men, at grips again, hurtled past me to come violently up against the door of the shower-cupboard. There was a crack as a wooden panel gave way; somewhere on the floor was the sharp explosion of breaking glass; then the bedsprings crashed and whined as the two bodies went down on the bed together.

I flung myself to my knees not two feet from the heaving bed, groping wildly for the torch. These things rolled in semicircles—I clutched it, wondering if the fall had broken the bulb.

It was a heavy torch and the catch was stiff. The bed, rocking like a ship in a storm, shot away from the wall on screaming castors, hurtled back again with a crash that brought plaster off the walls. The springs creaked and gave with an appalling noise as the men slithered to the edge and then fell to the floor.

A moment of gasping stillness, and then they were up again. A pause, filled with the sound of heavy breathing. I jumped to my feet, wrestling with the torch. Suddenly it flashed on.

For the second time that night it caught Simon full in the eyes. And this time the Greek, seizing the advantage like lightning, charged down the beam, out of the blinding light. Simon went over with a crash that shook the room. I saw him catch the edge of the bed with his shoulder as he fell. The blow must have crippled him momentarily, but surprisingly Dimitrios didn't follow it up. Nor did he turn to deal with me. He had his back to me, and the light waveringly pinned the heavy bull-like shoulders, the dark curled hair. He didn't even look round. I heard a gasping snarl in French, "Put the bloody thing out, will you?"

I hit him as hard as I could over the head.

I missed him. Just as the blow fell, something warned him. He didn't turn into the light. He lashed backwards with a crooked elbow that caught the torch, knocking it flying, then swept on to strike me full across the breast in a heavy blow that sent me staggering to fall at the foot of the bed. The torch hurtled wide a second time and went out for good. As I went down I saw, in one swift flash of the flying light, the Greek turn and leap for the doorway, with Simon after him in a lunge. And in the doorway stood Danielle, fully dressed, with wide brilliant eyes and parted lips.

She whipped back to let the man past. Then, with a languid-

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seeming movement that was nevertheless as swift as a snake's, she stepped into the path of Simon's rush. I heard the other man running up the corridor towards her room and the open window, as Simon came up violently against her body. I heard her gasp as his weight jammed her hard against the doorpost. He stopped.

I couldn't see more than the dim outlines of movement, but she must have been clinging to him for he said, harsh and breathless, "*Let me go!*" and she laughed in her throat. Along the corridor a door slammed. Simon moved sharply and said, very softly, "Do you hear me? Take your hands away, or you'll get hurt."

I realised with something like a sharp little shock that he was angry. I heard Danielle murmur, with the breath hurrying through the husky voice, "Go on doing that. I like it . . ."

There was a second of frozen silence, then the girl was flung aside against the other doorjamb with a violence that sent the breath out of her in a sharp cry that held more surprise than anything else. Before she could recover herself Simon was back in the room, hurling himself across it towards the window.

The casement was rusty and stiff. As it screeched wider I heard, like an echo at the other end of the building, the shriek of hinges, and the thud as a heavy body dropped to the ground. Steps clattered and slithered away into the darkness.

Simon was up on the sill, a dark bulk against the greying sky. But before he could swing himself out and after the quarry Danielle flew at him like an arrow and clung to his arm.

"Simon! Simon, let him go. Simon dear, what a fuss . . ." In spite of his recent violence she clung to him still, pleading in that voice which beneath its tone of sexiness might have held a touch of fear. "Simon, no! He was with me. Don't you understand? *With me.*"

I saw his hand fall from the window-catch. He turned. "What? What d'you mean?"

"What I say. He was in my room. He only came to see me."

I said from the floor beside the bed where I was still sitting, "It's true. I heard them."

I heard her laugh again, but the sound didn't hold its usual assurance. Simon shook her off as if she didn't exist and dropped lightly back into the room. "I—see. He's gone, anyway. Camilla, are you all right?"

"Perfectly. Is there any light?"

"I think the bulb's out. Half a minute." He seemed to be feeling in his pockets. "Did that brute hit you?"

"Yes, but I'm all right. I was just—I was keeping out of the way." I got up a bit unsteadily and sat on the bed, as Simon found matches and struck one. He surveyed me by its light. I smiled rather waveringly up at him. I saw then that he was dressed only in a pair of grey flannels. In the light of the match I could see the gleam of sweat on his chest and a shining dark trickle of blood from a cut at the side of the neck. He was breathing a little faster than usual—not much, but perceptibly a bit faster—and his eyes

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for once didn't look cool and amused at all. But the match burnt steadily in a tremorless hand.

I asked anxiously, "What about you?"

"Don't give it a thought. Honours were about even—more's the pity."

Danielle said petulantly, "What did you have to fight for?"

He said crisply, "My dear girl, he attacked me. What would you expect me to do?" He had lit another match and was looking round the room for the light-bulb.

I said, "That was Dimitrios, wasn't it?"

Simon gave me a fleeting look of surprise as he picked the light-bulb up from the washbasin.

Danielle turned her head as if startled, then smiled that cat-and-cream smile of hers. "You recognised him? Of course."

Simon dragged one of the wooden chairs forward, and now mounted it to fit the bulb into its socket. The light flashed on.

"Are you sure you're all right, Camilla?"

"Quite. But, Simon—where's Nigel?"

"I've no idea. He hasn't been to bed; that much is apparent."

Simon hesitated, then turned to Danielle. She was standing near the door, leaning against the wall in a pose of lazy grace. Her eyes looked long and sleepy again under the thick lashes. She had taken a cigarette out of a pocket and was lighting it. She dropped the burnt-out match on the floor. All through the operation the narrow glinting gaze had been on Simon . . . all over him.

He said, "So that man was with you? How did he get in?"

"By my window."

"Come off it, Danielle. Your window's twelve feet from the ground. Don't tell me you plaited sheets or let down your hair for him. Did you unlock the door for him or has he got a key?"

She said sulkily, under the coldness of his voice, "I don't see what the hell it's got to do with you, but yes, I did unlock it."

"It's got everything to do with me that your visitor was apparently prowling round where he's no damned right to be. And there's the little detail that he went for me with intent to do damage, if not worse. What was he doing in Nigel's room?"

"How do I know?"

"He jumped out of your window in the end. He could have gone that way in the first place. Why didn't he?"

"It was easier to get out through the door, and quieter. The key's in the lock."

"Then why did he come in here?"

She shrugged. "He must have heard you moving and dodged in so that you wouldn't see him. I don't know."

"He wasn't to know there was no one in the room."

"I'd told him they were nearly all empty. I expect he took a chance. And now I'm tired of this, and tired of the inquisition, and I'm going to bed." She yawned deliberately and daintily like a cat, showing all her pretty teeth and that pale pink tongue. Then she let the big sleepy eyes move insolently over me.

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Simon had found some cigarettes and given me one. He bent over me to light it. His breathing was even again now. If it hadn't been for the cut from the torch and that thin glaze of sweat drying on his skin, you would never have guessed that a few minutes ago he had been fighting for his life in the dark.

Danielle said, sounding suddenly waspish, "What are you doing here anyway, Camilla?"

"I heard a noise and I came along."

She smiled. "And got knocked down. Did he hurt you?"

"I hope not as much as I hurt him."

She looked startled. "You hurt him? How?"

"I hit him over the back of the neck with the torch. Hard."

She stared at me for a moment longer, a very queer look.

"*You hit him?*" Her voice sounded shaken. "You have no business—he is my lover. If I wish him to come here—"

I said sharply, "He was doing his best to kill Simon. And besides, I owed him something."

She looked at me stupidly. "You—owed him something?"

"Yes. And don't play the innocent, Danielle. You didn't look so innocent on the Shining Ones this afternoon."

"I . . . see." She let out a breath.

Simon said sharply, "What are you talking about?"

"Nothing. It was Camilla's imagination. She thinks Dimitrios—oh, it's so silly that I won't speak of it." She dropped the half-smoked cigarette and turned quickly. I got to my feet.

"Just a minute," said Simon pleasantly. "No, please don't go yet, Camilla. We're forgetting Nigel. Danielle, have you any idea where he might be? Did he say anything last night to—?"

She said viciously, "Why should I know where the fool went? I don't know and I don't care. He could be dead as far as I'm concerned. I'm going. I'm sick of this."

I said, "I think I know where he went."

Simon was dabbing at his cut neck with a handkerchief. I saw his brows shoot up. "You seem to know an awful lot tonight."

"Doesn't she?" Danielle stopped in the doorway. Her voice was not, like his, amused. "All right, you tell us."

I said, "It's only a guess. But d'you remember our talk in here the other night about Nigel as an artist needing a new gimmick, and the Dutch painter walking from Jannina?"

"Yes. You're not suggesting that Nigel has taken a leaf out of that boy's book, are you?"

I said, "There's been a mule stolen from the excavations above the shrine. I know because the guide told me this morning—yesterday morning, I suppose I should say. And I saw Nigel out early the same morning, and he was trying not to be seen—"

"Where?" asked Danielle.

"Just outside the studio here."

"Which way was he going?"

"I didn't see. He seemed to be making farther up Parnassus."

"Ah well," said Simon, "you may be right. I suppose what

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Nigel does is very much his own affair, and he was certainly feeling thoroughly unsettled. He may easily have cut loose for a few days." He turned to rinse out his bloodstained handkerchief under the tap. "I think we'd better just tidy his room and get out of it. There's blood on the washbasin here, and I'm afraid the floor isn't all it should be. We'd better have a look at the damage and do what we can."

I said, "Leave that. I'll clean the basin. But let me have a look at that cut, will you? Danielle, perhaps you'll be good enough to clear the floor and pick up that broken glass?"

She sent me one of those looks of glittering dislike, which was this time quite justified. "It won't take you long. I'm tired. You forget, I haven't been to sleep yet tonight, and oh, how I need that sleep." She yawned, gave another narrow-eyed look at me, and went out rather quickly, shutting the door behind her.

My eyes met Simon's in the mirror. I said, "You wanted to get rid of her, didn't you?"

"You're coming on, aren't you, thought-reader? Yes."

"Why?"

The smile vanished. He turned and looked down at me. His eyes were grave, sombre even. "Because I don't like the feel of this thing, Camilla."

"The feel of it?"

"Yes. Too much is happening. Some of it may be irrelevant, or it may matter the hell of a lot. Danielle and this man, for instance. Danielle and Nigel. I've begun to wonder."

He added slowly, "This Greek—this lover of Danielle's—you said his name was Dimitrios."

"Yes. I met him yesterday on the way back from the corrie. He was with her above the Shining Ones."

"Camilla, has nothing occurred to you about this—Dimitrios?"

"Occurred to me? What sort of thing?" I stopped short. I said, on a long breath, "*Dimitrios!*"

"Exactly. You remember? Angelos Dragoumis had a cousin called Dimitrios, who went to live at Itea. At Itea, mark you."

"And I saw the jeep down at Itea. Danielle had driven it straight down there when she got in from Athens! If it's the same Dimitrios, then Dimitrios Dragoumis is Danielle's lover, and that was his house I saw. I'll bet, if the jeep's anything to go by, that she was there when I passed the house!"

"You're certain it was the same jeep?"

"Quite. I told you I recognised the doll hanging on the windscreen. There was someone tinkering with the engine, and that wasn't Dimitrios, but all the same I've a feeling we're right. It's the same Dimitrios. That would explain why Danielle's so darned interested in you." I added, "Or partly."

He passed that one.

"Well then, say we're right, and let's look at what we have: Dimitrios Dragoumis is Danielle's lover. Dimitrios, the cousin of Angelos, sends Danielle into Athens to hire him a car—on a

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matter of life and death. In other words, in a hell of a hurry."

"Well?"

His eyes lifted. "An expensive need. They say he's a fisherman. Why would he want a car?"

I sat down again on the bed. "I don't know. Go on."

Absently, he flicked a gout of ash into the washbasin.

"Danielle hired a car for him, but then got the better offer of a jeep from her French friend Clément and came up in that. She didn't revisit the garage to let them know, and she hadn't given them Dragoumis' name—hence all the trouble about Monsieur Simon's girl and the car for Monsieur Simon of Delphi that led to the interfering but well-meant efforts of Miss Camilla Haven. But Danielle's actions do spell something."

"Urgency," I said slowly, "yes. And secrecy?"

"Exactly. And I could bear to know what's urgent and secret about Danielle, and about Dimitrios the cousin of Angelos," said Simon.

A pause. A beetle blundered in through the open casement, hit the wall with a crack like a pistol-shot, and zoomed out again into the dark.

"But—the car?" I said, seizing on what was still my own piece of the mystery. "Why the car? You said Dimitrios Dragoumis was a fisherman. What would he need a car for?"

"He is a fisherman and he owns a boat. And now he has a jeep, got from Athens and kept very quiet locally. To me," Simon said, "that adds up to one thing. Transport."

"*Urgent, secret transport. But no, Simon. It's absurd.*"

"Why?"

"I can see what you're getting at—the reason why Angelos' cousin might need this urgent and secret transport. You think Dimitrios has found Angelos' cache, his traitor's hoard of British gold—whatever it was that Michael may have discovered on Parnassus. And the jeep and the caique are to carry—oh!"

"Well?"

"*The mule!* Simon—the mule!"

He nodded. "You can't take a jeep up Parnassus, can you? The mule was stolen the night we went to see the shepherd, Stephanos. Danielle brought the jeep up the same day. I'll bet you anything you like that Dimitrios' caique will shortly be lying carefully invisible in one of the tiny inlets beyond Amphissa."

I said, "Look, Simon, you're only guessing. It *could* have been Nigel who took the mule. He looked pretty secretive when I saw him sloping off yesterday morning."

"I still don't think he took the mule. It vanished on Monday night, and that night Nigel was up here."

I said tautly, "You're right. It wasn't Nigel. I've just remembered something. When we were in the theatre, I heard something moving up the hillside above me. I thought nothing of it—but I remember now that I heard a small chinking of metal, like a shod hoof or the nails of a boot."

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Simon smiled. "The mules here aren't shod. If you heard movement and the chink of metal, Camilla, then you heard a beast's bridle. It sounds as if you might have heard the mule being stolen. Friend Dimitrios, taking the mule off up the hill." There was a little silence.

Then I said, "But, Simon, you can't be right. Maybe Dimitrios *is* up to no good, and maybe Danielle *is* in it, and maybe they *did* steal the mule and hire the car to transport something, but it can't, it just can't, be Michael's treasure!"

"Why not?"

"Because it's too much to swallow that Dimitrios should have found Angelos' cache *now*, this week, the very week you're in Delphi. That's too much of a coincidence, and I don't believe it."

"But is it?"

"How d'you mean?"

"I mean that the two incidents are certainly related, but not by chance. Dimitrios found the hiding-place, not just while I happen to be here—but simply *because* I am here."

I stared up at him. I passed my tongue over my lips. "You mean that he followed us up to the corrie yesterday?"

"Precisely that."

I said hoarsely, "When I was sitting there in the corrie and you were in the cave with the other two men, I thought I saw something move at the top of the cliff. It could have been someone watching."

His gaze sharpened. "Are you sure of that?"

"Not really. But I thought there was movement and looked up, but couldn't see anything. The sun was in my eyes."

"Well, it might have been Dimitrios. And he followed us down, intending to meet Danielle on top of the Shining Ones.

"Dimitrios, you'll remember, did try to find out from Stephanos —the only man who knew about the place where Michael died— anything he could about Michael's death. He didn't get a thing out of Stephanos. Perhaps he did try to find the place himself. Perhaps he gathered a slender clue or two from his cousin before he left the country. But even with definite instructions from Angelos he still could have been raking the mountain all this time and found nothing. All the marks, like the cat's-tooth pinnacle, have gone, and anything could lie buried under that earthquake rubble. Even Angelos himself, if he were still alive and if he came back to look, would be in exactly the same case."

I said rather breathlessly, "Niko, Stephanos' grandson, said there were ghosts on Parnassus and lights—d'you remember?"

"Dimitrios may have been seen searching. Supposing he had had no luck in locating the cache; then, years after, he heard that I, Michael Lester's brother, was coming to Delphi. This might prove to be his chance. What is more likely than that Stephanos would show me, Michael's brother, the place? It's quite some time since I planned this visit; Dimitrios could have known, and taken time over his preparations.

"Supposing we were right, and he had noticed Danielle driving

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down almost daily to Itea with the jeep to bathe? Here was transport of the kind he would need. It would be easy enough to scrape acquaintance with Danielle, and buy her silence and her help with a promise to cut her in on the final haul. It would only remain to collect a mule or a donkey, and there again Danielle was the answer. I'll bet you she took the mule; she'd worked with the archæologists for weeks and she knew just where everything was kept and how to get at it . . . What is it?"

"The guide said they took some tools and a mule."

"*Did* he?" The light-grey eyes blazed. "Well! Does it make sense, or not? Or am I jumping ahead too fast?"

"Pretty fast, but go on."

"Yes, Dimitrios has everything lined up for the day when Simon Lester should arrive and lead him straight to the spot where Michael died. But then he—Dimitrios—has a stroke of bad luck."

"Clément the archæologist, Danielle's boss, leaves Delphi, and she goes, too—with the jeep?"

"Exactly. She went on Sunday, perforce. She must have gone straight to the garage in Athens and arranged to pick up a car next day." He grinned. "We know what happened next. Her error. But luck came in again, as she persuaded Clément to let her have the jeep. And she came back. She took the jeep down to Itea. Whether she brought Dimitrios up with her that night we can't know, but she probably did. She—or he—took the mule and a crowbar or so from the workmen's sheds above the shrine."

"All Dimitrios had to do was to wait and follow us. Too easy."

"Much too easy. I should have thought of it after what Stephanos told me, but I admit it never seriously occurred to me—till I saw the earthquake damage up there—that anything Mick found might still be hidden. However, there it is. All he has to do is to hunt that fairly small stretch of cliff."

"Why did he come here tonight? Just to see Danielle?"

He said soberly, "Ah, that. That's what I meant when I said I didn't like the feel of this affair." He paused, then turned to pitch the stub of his cigarette out of the open window. "I'm afraid Nigel's in this somewhere and I want to know where."

"You mean that Dimitrios came to see *him*?"

"No. Dimitrios came here looking for something. And I could bear to know what." He glanced round the room. "And I could also bear to know where Nigel is."

I said, "The drawings have gone."

"What? Oh, the ones on the wall. So they have. Well, the sooner we find out what else is gone the better." He began to move round the bare untidy little room as he spoke.

"Perhaps Danielle was telling the truth. Perhaps he did only come in here to hide from you when he heard you move."

"Not on your life." He had opened the shower-cupboard and was rummaging inside. "He didn't have time, after he'd heard me move, to take out that light-bulb. He did that as soon as he got into the room, and that means Dimitrios had some business in

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here that was going to take a minute or two, and he didn't want to risk being surprised and recognised. As I shoved the door open, I saw the light swinging round the room as if he was looking for something. That was all, because of course he turned on me."

I laughed. "Yes, and you told Danielle he attacked you—which, sir, was a lie. I was watching, and you went bald-headed for Dimitrios before he even had time to say good evening!"

He grinned. "And for a very good reason. He whipped round when he heard me at the door, and he pulled a knife. I thought it best not to give him time to think about using it."

I drew a long breath. "I—see. You were right about the feel of this thing, weren't you? All I can say is, that for a member of our staid and slightly stuffy profession, your reactions are—well, fairly rapid, not to say decisive."

He was still smiling. "I'm afraid I rather enjoyed it. I like a good and dirty fight . . . I say, Camilla."

"Yes?"

"Nigel's things *are* all gone."

"Everything? Not just his painting things?"

"Everything, I think. So he meant to go, anyway. Damn the boy, he might have told me, and saved me a couple of sleepless hours. Well, at least he isn't sitting up on Parnassus somewhere with a sprained ankle, whatever else he's got himself into. I'll just make sure there's nothing down here . . . ah, there's the Greek's knife. I thought I heard it fly under the bed. And that hellish clanging noise we made was Nigel's apology for a waste-paper basket. Lord, what a mess! Orange peel and pencil shavings and all the dud drawings thrown away. I really think we'll have to bribe our way out of this, Camilla, my girl."

"For goodness' sake let me help." I slipped from the bed to the floor and gathered up a handful of papers. I dropped them into the biscuit tin that served Nigel for a waste-basket. "I'll clear this stuff up. You see if that chair'll mend, and straighten the table. There's no damage except the broken glass, and we'd better leave that till morning and see if we can find a brush and—*Simon!*"

He swung round. "What is it?"

"These papers are not dud drawings at all. They're the finished things, his Hellenic types!" I shuffled them through my hands. "Yes, look, here they are! There's the head that's a bit like Stephanos, and the smiling archaic one that looked like a statue—and here's a shepherd boy. And more—look."

I began to leaf through them rapidly. My hand wasn't quite steady. "I know he was doing them under protest and he *was* feeling at odds with life, but surely, Simon, he can't afford to throw them away? What in the world—" I stopped short.

I said shakily, "This is the head, that lovely, lovely head. The young man with the strange face. And look, he's torn it up. Not the others, but this. It's torn right across." I looked down sadly at the fragments on my lap.

Simon stooped to take the pieces from me, and studied them.

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"What else is there? Not the flower studies, surely?"

"No, no. They're all the 'types,' except that lovely head."

I heard him take a breath, as if of relief, and when he spoke I knew he had had the same fleeting stab of fear as I myself. "Then —whatever made him go—I don't think we need worry overmuch. That fit of the blues hasn't made him plan anything foolish after all; he's taken the good stuff with him. Except this." He opened his fingers and let the fragments drift down on to my lap. The action was like a shrug, a sigh. "Ah well, we can't guess what's biting the boy. But I'll be thankful when I know."

I said abruptly, "The cyclamen."

He said, suddenly sounding weary, "Is that there as well?"

"No. It's not here. That's not what I meant. But I've remembered something, Simon, and I think it's important. Yesterday, when we were up in the corrie—Michael's corrie—I saw a plant of cyclamen growing in the rock. I didn't realise it at the time—at least I think I must have done subconsciously, because I know I was thinking about Nigel as I looked at it—but it was the same plant that was in his drawing. I tell you, I didn't connect it then; but now, when we were talking about his drawings, I somehow saw it again. And it was exactly the same. I'm sure of it. And that means that Nigel's been up in that corrie too!

"And perhaps, if *Nigel* had found Angelos' cave, that would explain some of the things he said on Monday night. Simon, Nigel was in that corrie, and if you ask me, Nigel found the cave —and Angelos' hoard was still there!"

Simon said, hard and sharp, "Then if Nigel found anything in that corrie, he found it on Monday. He did that drawing on Monday."

"Yes, and he told you he'd done no work, till we found that he'd slipped up over the archaic head and the cyclamen!"

He said slowly, "It could be. I went up some of the way over the track with him on Sunday. He might have gone back on his own and stumbled on the place. One of those weird freaks of chance, but they do happen. Oh, my God, suppose he did!"

We stared at each other.

I said, "And yesterday morning I saw him setting off again, and looking secretive about it. Simon, perhaps it was *Nigel* who took the mule. Perhaps Nigel's trying to move the stuff, whatever it is, himself."

Simon said, in a harsh voice that was anything but casual, "And if he is? If he's got across that damned murderous Greek in the process? Don't forget he's somewhere in this, too."

"Simon, don't worry so. One thing's obvious; he did mean to go. Whatever he's up to, and even if he has tangled with Dimitrios' affairs, he's gone deliberately. He may have got himself into something illegal, but he meant to, and—well, you can't really be his keeper to that extent, can you?"

He hesitated, then suddenly smiled. "I suppose not. At least, not till it's daylight!"

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I said, making a statement of it, "You're going up there, of course."

"I intended to anyway, and now it seems I shall have to."

"When do we start?"

He looked at me. That unreadable mask had shut down again over his face. I don't know what I expected him to say. I know what nine men out of ten would have said—Simon didn't say it at all. He said merely, "I'll come and call you. Now you'd better go and sleep. We'll have to make an early start."

We saw no one on our way to the corrie.

Most of the way from Delphi the track was easy to follow, and, apart from one open stretch soon after we had left the top of the Shining Ones, it wound along rocky valleys which would have offered plenty of cover in case of alarm. But the hot desert of broken rocks seemed as empty as it had been yesterday.

At length, we made our way up a steep dry watercourse, and I looked towards the right and saw the line of cliffs that held the corrie. Simon, who was ahead of me, stopped and turned.

"We'll wait here, I think, and eat. Look, there's a good place in the shade between those two boulders. We can't be seen, and we can keep an eye on the valley and on those cliffs. I'd like to be quite sure no one else is about before we make our way up."

I sat down thankfully in the place he indicated, and he produced food from the haversack. The tepid water was a benison, and the fruit ambrosia itself.

I let Simon do the watching. After I had eaten I relaxed against the rock with eyes half shut against the light, and he lit a cigarette for me.

He showed no sign of hurry, impatience, or even curiosity. I saw his eyes move almost idly across the landscape, up to the corrie, along the cliff, down the scree, back to the corrie.

At the very edge of my vision there was a movement.

I turned my head sharply, eyes fully open now. I could see nothing. But there had been a movement; of that I was sure. I was just about to touch Simon's arm when I saw it again; it was as if one of the rocks of the scree had moved. A goat. It was only a goat. As it walked forward, taking shape against the void of tumbled rock, I saw others with it, two, three of them, moving purposefully along some age-old track of their own.

I was wondering half idly if there was a goatherd with them and if perhaps they had strayed from the flock, when I thought I heard, far away over the cliff-top, the sound of a pipe. Even as I heard it and strained my ears to catch the notes, it faded, and I dismissed it as fancy. The thin, broken stave had been purely pastoral, something from a myth of Arcady, nymphs and shepherds and pan-pipes and green valleys. But this was Parnassus, home of more terrible gods.

I relaxed again and watched the smoke from my cigarette wind up in the sunlight. I remember that I didn't think at all about the

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business of the day. I thought about Parnassus, and the gods who lived there, and then of Simon. I stole a look at him.

He was gazing almost dreamily up towards the cliffs. He caught my look and smiled, and moved his hand lazily to knock ash from his cigarette. "I was wondering if there was anyone with those goats."

"I thought I heard a pipe being played, away over there, but I expect I imagined it. Did you hear anything?"

"No. But it's possible. I don't think those four would be up here on their own. You must have very good hearing. I never heard a sound."

He crushed out his cigarette and got up, reaching a hand down to me. "Shall we go up now? I think we're unobserved, but I don't want to cross that big open stretch towards the corrie gateway. If we skirt it, and go up that gully there, I think we can get round without the risk of being seen, and it'll bring us out above the cliff where we were yesterday. It'll be a bit of a stiff pull. Remember to keep down. This is where the real stalk starts . . ."

Simon lay flat at the corrie's lip, looking downwards. I crouched behind him, a little way back from the cliff edge. I waited, watching him for a signal.

It seemed an age before he moved. Then he turned his head and lifted a hand with a slow cautious movement that carried its own warning.

In spite of myself, I could feel my taut nerves like cold wires touching the skin. I inched forward until I lay beside Simon. I was screened by one of the low holly-oaks. I lifted my head slowly till my eyes were above the level of the edge. I looked down into the corrie.

There was no one there.

As I looked at him, with surprise in my face and a question, he put his lips to my ear. "Dimitrios is here."

Again that coward jerk of the heart. Every vein in my body was contracting, little thrilling wires tightening till my muscles wouldn't obey me. I had ducked my head down behind the holly-oak, and my cheek was on my hand in the hot dust. The hand was cold.

Simon breathed into my ear, "He's just vanished somewhere underneath us. I saw him duck under that piece in the corner." He jerked his head slightly towards it. "Is that where you went exploring yesterday?"

I nodded. I swallowed. "What was he doing?"

"I don't know. He just seemed to be hanging about. Waiting for someone or something. Nigel, perhaps, or—"

He broke off and seemed to go lower into the ground. I shrank down beside him. The holly-oak hid me, and I peered down.

Then I saw Dimitrios. He came out from somewhere below us, ducking his head as he passed under the flying buttress that seemed to shore up the cliff. He was smoking, and his eyes were frowning and narrowed against the high blaze of sun. He walked carefully over the rocky floor of the corrie towards the northern

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gap in the wall. Every now and again he stopped as if to listen.

He reached the corrie entrance and stopped there, staring down towards Amphissa. Once he turned his head and looked the other way, the way we had come from Delphi. Then he came back into the corrie. He flung down the butt of his cigarette and lit another.

I noticed sweat on his dark face and dust yellowish-white on his clothes. He wasn't in the dark suit today; he was wearing dungarees in faded blue, and a khaki shirt with a red neckerchief.

The cigarette was alight now. He dropped the match, then looked round him as if undecided. He took a few steps into the corrie, and I thought he was going back towards the corner where the cyclamen was when he stopped suddenly as if impatient of waiting, turned sharply on his heel as if his mind was at last made up, and walked rapidly out of the corrie.

Simon said in my ear, " Gone to meet Nigel or Danielle? Give him a minute or two."

We gave him five. They seemed very long minutes. There was no other sound in the hot morning but our own breathing. The sun beat down on us as we lay on the bare earth. I was thankful when Simon moved at last.

We got quickly to our feet, and went down the twisting little path like a couple of mountain goats. We almost ran across the corrie floor and ducked under the fallen rock into the corner.

There it was, the patch of brilliant green, and the drifts of tiny bluebells, the lovely traces of the mountain rain. But today it was different. I caught my breath and stood staring at the cliff.

The cyclamen had gone. Where it had clung to its crack in the rock there was now a black fissure. The crack had widened, split, and gaped open, as pressure had been exerted on the weather-rotted rock. I could see the raw white marks where the crowbars had gained their leverage.

A slab, similarly marked, lay at our feet, newly fallen, and crushing the fresh grass. Yesterday it had been leaning against the rock face, masking what lay behind from my casual glance. Today there was a split in the face of the rock, some seven feet high by a foot and a half wide—a narrow fissure which angled sharply up to a point at the top. It opened on to darkness. The cave. Michael's cave.

My mouth was dry. I said hoarsely, " Yesterday that slab was leaning up against the cliff, at an angle. There was a crack behind it, very narrow. I remember now. It didn't look like an entrance."

He nodded, but he wasn't looking at me or at the mouth of the cave. He looked past me, up at the cliff-top, the corrie-walls, all round us.

No movement. No sound.

There were mule-droppings on the grass that hadn't been there yesterday. I pointed to them silently, and Simon nodded. He said softly, " We were right, then. We'll go in. You wait here a moment. And keep those ears of yours open. I won't be long."

He disappeared into the darkness of the cleft. I waited. Once

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again, far away, I thought I heard that little thread of music, the ghostly echo of the pan-pipes. Heard now, in this hot cruel corrie, the sound spoke no longer of Arcady, and the kindly god of flocks and herds. It was a panic prickle along the flesh.

It had gone. I had imagined it again. I stood with my hands tightly clasped together in front of me, and made myself wait without moving.

Simon showed in the darkness of the cleft like a beckoning ghost. I almost ran towards him into the cool blackness of the cave.

After the glare of day the place was dead-dark. It was like running against a black velvet curtain. I stopped, blinded. I felt Simon's arm come round me, guiding me in out of the light, then he switched on a torch. The light seemed feeble and probing after the blaze of day, but we could see.

We were in a widish passage which sloped gently downwards for some five or six yards and then turned abruptly to the left. The original entrance must have been wide, but it had been blocked by successive falls of stone to leave only the narrow cleft through which we had come. The passage itself was clear enough, and smelt fresh and cool.

Simon said, "The slope gets steeper. There's another twist down to the right, and then the cave itself . . ."

The main cave was huge, a great natural cavern with a high curved ceiling that vanished into darkness, and clefts and recesses that swallowed the feebly-probing torchlight. Stalactites and stalagmites made strangely-shaped, enormous pillars. Fallen rock lay here as well. In some of the dimly-seen apses there were boulders and masses of rough stone showing in the elusive light. I could hear the faint drip of water. The place was impressive, magnificent, but a ruin. Dust and rubble lay everywhere, some of it recent-looking, some of it apparently undisturbed for centuries.

The torchlight moved, swept, checked.

Simon said, "There."

He said it softly, almost idly, but I knew him now. My heart gave that painful jerk of excitement.

The light was holding something in its dim circle, a circle which seemed to have brightened, sharpened, focused. A pile of rubble by a column to the left of the cavern-mouth looked at first like any of the other heaps of fallen debris, then I saw that among the shapes of the broken rock, more regular shapes showed—a cubed corner—the dusty outline of a box. And in the rubble, the dull gleam of metal: a crowbar and a shovel.

The torchlight swept farther. "See that? They've shifted some of it already. See where it's been dragged through the dust?" He sent the light skating quickly round the rest of the great cavern. Nothing.

Another time I would have exclaimed over the ghostly icicles of rock, the arches, the chambered darknesses, but now my whole interest, like the torchlight, was centred on that pile of rock-debris and what it contained. Simon moved forward with me beside him

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and bent over the exposed corner of the box. He didn't disturb it. The torch worked for him. "There's the Government stamp. This isn't gold, Camilla. It's guns."

"Guns?"

"Uh-huh. Small and useful Sten guns." He straightened up and switched the light out for a moment. In the thick darkness his voice was soft and grim. "There's an excellent market for this sort of thing at several points in the Med. just now. Well, well."

I said, "I don't believe that Nigel would do that."

The torch flashed on again. "Come to think of it, neither do I. I wonder—" He moved round the pile, exploring deeper into the darkness behind the big stalagmite. "Ammo. Stacks of it."

"Simon," I said, "d'you mean these were flown in here during the war?"

"Yes I told you. Gold and arms galore."

"But that was 1942, wasn't it? They wouldn't keep, surely?"

I heard him laugh. "You talk as if they were fish. Of course they'll keep. They're packed in grease. They'll come out good as new... Ah! My God, this'd take a couple of days to shift, this stuff. No wonder . . ." His voice trailed away.

"Simon? What is it?"

He said without a trace of inflection, "The gold."

I moved forward so fast that I tripped over a root of the stalagmite and almost fell. "*Where?*"

"Steady there. So this is what treasure trove does to you? Here." The torchlight was steady on the pile of broken rock. Among the dust and splintered fragments the corners of two small boxes showed. They were metal, but the corner of one had been smashed open, and under the dusty gaping metal was the living gleam of gold.

Simon was saying, "That was Michael's little find, Camilla. That's why Mick was murdered. But I still don't quite . . ."

He paused, and I saw his brows draw together, but he went on in his even voice, "Well, we were right, as far as it went. Two boxes at least, and there may be more under the rubble."

"They're very small, aren't they?"

"One of them would be one man's work, all the same. Did you know that gold is almost twice as heavy as lead? They'll have quite a job shifting what they've got here."

I said, "They?"

He answered my look. "I'm afraid you were right about Nigel. I think he *was* on his way up here yesterday morning, and it's Nigel who's been working here while Dimitrios was in Delphi."

I said apprehensively, "But we don't know they're working together. If Dimitrios came up last night or early today, and found Nigel here, and set about him the way he did with you—"

He shook his head. "No. Think it out. There must be two of them in it. Look at this stuff again; look how it's buried. Angelos probably threw a bit of rubble and small stones over it to hide it, but he never put this pile of rock here.

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This has come down in an earth tremor—probably the one that shut the cave and broke the cliff above us. Shifting this kind of thing is sheer hard work, and Dimitrios just hasn't had time to do everything alone."

"You mean?"

"Work it out. There must be two men on the job, Camilla. If Nigel found the cave, it still hadn't been opened up enough yesterday to let those boxes be carried out. Whether Nigel showed it to Dimitrios, or whether Dimitrios found it himself as soon as we left the corrie yesterday, the man simply hasn't had time single-handed to do all this. He followed us almost straight down to Delphi; he wouldn't have had time to get his tools from where they were hidden and shift that slab. Even if he came back to do that later, he was in Delphi again in the middle of the night."

He paused for a moment, as if listening, and then went on, "And look at the situation just now. We know Danielle went north with the jeep. She won't have had time to get up here from the Amphissa road. Dimitrios is waiting for someone, but it's not Danielle. The mule's been here, hasn't it, and gone? At a guess, Dimitrios is waiting for whoever has taken the mule over, loaded, to meet the jeep. Nigel."

The torch flashed again, momentarily, over the gold. He said, "You remember Stephanos saying that the old track leads to a disused quarry near the Amphissa road? It sounds the sort of place where they might park the jeep out of sight while they ferry the stuff across the hill with the mule. They seem to have made a start on the guns. I imagine they'll stack the loot somewhere down near the road till they can get it all away together; and if they've any sense they'll leave the gold safely here till the last minute— Did you hear anything?"

We stood very still with the light out. "No," I said. Then, slowly, "You know, I—I don't trust Dimitrios."

I heard the ghost of a laugh in the dark. "Today's great thought, Camilla, my darling? You surprise me."

He had surprised me, too, but I hoped my voice didn't show it. I said, "I was thinking of Nigel. Even if they are working together now, it's only because Nigel found the stuff first, and Dimitrios wants help to shift it. Once the work's done—" I stopped, and licked dry lips.

"I know." No trace of amusement now. "Well, we're here, so that should be taken care of."

"Yes. But, Simon—" even to me the whisper sounded thin and miserably uncertain—"Simon, what are we going to do?"

"Wait. What else can we do? We don't know the score yet, but no doubt we soon will."

He switched on again, and the light flicked round the cavern. "There's plenty of cover here, and we'll hear them in good time—or at least you will. If Nigel comes up alone, all the better, but if it should be Dimitrios coming back . . ."

He grinned down at me, but some quality in the grin brought

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the reverse of comfort. I said suddenly, accusingly, "You *want* him to come back."

"And if I do?" The smile deepened at the expression on my face. "Camilla, don't you see? I pray he does come back. There's your score to settle as well as mine, and now there's that idiotic boy to straighten out. It would be better if Dimitrios came. Don't you see?"

"Oh yes, I see."

His hand came out momentarily to touch my cheek, a moth-light touch. "Don't be scared, my dear. I'm not going to get killed and leave you alone with the wolves." He gave a little laugh. "I've not the slightest intention of fighting fair, and two can play at the game of attacking down a torch-beam."

I said, I hoped steadily, "He may be armed."

"I'm pretty sure he's not. There wasn't room for a gun in those dungarees."

"He's probably got himself another knife."

"Probably. And I've got his. Two can play at that game, too."

"*Simon!*"

I heard him laugh again as he moved away. "Poor Camilla. Now, half a minute. Stay where you are. I'll be back."

He slid, with wary flashes of the torch, out of the cave, and the small light dwindled and vanished into the curve of the passage-way. He was gone perhaps two minutes. I stayed just where I was, with the gold at my feet, and one hand nervously fingering the bulk of the Greek's torch in my pocket. Then the will-o'-the-wisp light danced back along the passage wall, and Simon was beside me. "Not a sign of either of them, so we'll have a closer look at this stuff, I think."

"Do you want any help?"

"No, thanks. Scout around and find a bolt-hole to make for when he comes." He was already busy, crouching beside the pile of rubble.

I left him to his task, his hands moving among the dust just as Michael's hands must have moved fourteen years ago when he made the same discovery. I flashed my torch back momentarily as I moved away. It showed his crouching body, the quiet intent face, the hands: Michael Lester finding evidence of treachery to the Allies. For some reason I gave a little shiver.

They said ghosts walked, didn't they? And the ghost of Angelos, who smiled as he killed? "If ghosts are true," Niko had said, "then he still walks on Parnassus . . ."

The cave was even bigger than I had thought. I passed between pillars of stalagmites as massive as Apollo's columns at Delphi, and into an anteroom as deep as a private chapel. There was ample cover. Simon and I could lie hidden almost anywhere when Dimitrios came.

The light was uncertain in my hand. Its beam touched the walls, the fallen masses that blocked the antechamber, and diffused itself into nothingness among the dark recesses. But even as I

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turned back, the edge of the light shimmered momentarily with a sliding, liquid gleam. I paused.

There was the drip of water again, more clearly now.

I went forward, the torch exploring ahead of me. The floor lifted a little, and there was a streak of damp on it that caught the light. I could feel freshness in the air, above the dead dust-smells of the cave, and there was the drip of water, closer now and clearer: there must be a spring in the cave—perhaps the same spring whose overflow fed the grass and flowers outside.

I went forward quickly, the light flickering over the rock in eager search. There was the now-familiar pile of broken rock against the rear wall of the cave; there the wall itself, streaked with damp and seamed with black fissures; there a wrecked stalagmite leaning drunkenly against a slab that lay at an angle to the wall.

There was something very familiar about the slab. It only took me a couple of seconds to realise why.

It was the same shape, and leaned in the same way, as the slab that yesterday had barred the cave-mouth and today lay tumbled in the grass outside.

I approached it slowly, knowing what I would find. As I paused beside it I could hear the drip of water plainly. Then I felt the skin prickle cold again along my arms and back.

With the drip of water came another sound, a sound that I had heard already twice that day and disbelieved, as I disbelieved it now. The sound of a pipe. Pan's pipe. It played a delicate little fall of notes; another; again. Silence, and the drip of water.

And the sound had come from behind the leaning slab.

With the hair lifting along my arms I bent to peer behind it.

I was right. There was a gap, narrow, perhaps eight inches wide, but still a gap. And it didn't, like the other cave-mouth, give on to darkness. Beyond it, the darkness slackened.

I think I had forgotten Dimitrios. I said softly, and even to me the echoes of my voice sounded queer, "There's a way through here. I'm going to see."

I don't know if Simon answered. I was squeezing through the narrow gap. The rock scraped me, caught at my clothes, then let me through.

I was in a widish passage which led upwards in a gentle curve. The floor was smooth. Round me the darkness slackened further, and more clearly through the torchlight the walls of the gallery took shape. Ahead of me it curved more sharply to the right, and beyond the curve I could see that the light grew clearer. The drip of the water was clear and loud.

Then it came again, the sound I had been listening for above the trickle of water: a little stave of music, hauntingly off key.

I rounded the corner. Ahead was the light, the arch of the gallery framing a blaze muted by moving green. I caught a glimpse of grass, and the hanging boughs of some slender tree dappling the sunlight at the mouth of the tunnel.

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I almost ran the rest of the way. I ducked under the arch and came suddenly, blindingly, into a little dell.

It was a small enclosure, like a light-well. Centuries ago this had been a circular cave into which the gallery had run, but the roof had fallen in and let in the sun and the seeds of grass and wild vines, and the spring had fed them so that now, in the heart of the mountain, was this little well of vivid light roofed with the moving green of some delicate tree. The music had stopped.

The only sound was the drip of the spring and the rustle of leaves. But I had no thought to spare for Pan and his music.

Apollo himself was here! He was standing not ten feet from me as I came out of the tunnel. He was naked, and in his hand was a bow. He stood looking over my head as he had stood for two thousand years.

I heard Simon coming along the tunnel behind me. I moved aside. He came quickly out of the dark archway into the dappled light, saying, "Camilla, I—" He stopped as if he'd been struck in the throat. I heard him say, "Oh, God," under his breath.

Some draught moved the curtain of leaves. Light flickered and burnt from the gold of the bow, and shifted along the bronze of the throat and face. A broken arrow of gold lay in the grass at the statue's feet.

After a lifetime or so I heard myself saying shakily, "This—*this* is what Nigel found. Look." I stooped and picked up the little water-pot from where it lay in the damp moss at my feet.

"Yes." Simon turned the pot over in his hand. "That's Nigel's. He may have heard the water when he was drawing the cyclamen outside, and that led him into the cave and then through here—to this." His eyes, like mine, were fixed on the statue.

The face was god-like: remote, wise, serene, but young and with a kind of eagerness behind the level brows.

I said breathlessly, "It's the face in the drawing, isn't it? The lovely drawing he tore up. I said it looked like a statue. D'you remember how he snatched it back from us?"

Simon said slowly, "That was when Danielle was there. But before that—he seemed to be on the verge of telling me something, and when Danielle came in he shut up."

"He wouldn't want her to know about this."

He went down on one knee in the grass. Very gently he lifted the golden arrow. Where it had lain the whitened grass-roots showed a clear print. He put it down again.

"As I thought. Nothing's been touched. You can't tell me friend Dimitrios could have kept his paws off a bit of loose gold."

He got to his feet with a breath of relief. "No, the boy's kept his mouth shut, and there's quite enough in the outer cave to fix Dimitrios' interest there. Thank God for the artist's conscience. But I think the sooner I get hold of Nigel the better."

"You—you don't think Dimitrios'll come exploring, like I did, and find it?"

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He laughed under his breath. "I'd bet on it that he won't. He's far too busy for one thing, and for another, now that I come to think of it, even if he was dying of thirst he'd never squeeze through the gap."

"I suppose not. But how in the world did Apollo get in here? And why?" I put a hand to my head.

"We can make a pretty good guess, I think. You know that the sanctuary at Delphi, after it ceased to be able to protect itself and its vast wealth, was plundered again and again—Nero alone took some five hundred statues to Rome, and he was only one in a long, long queue of robbers. We don't know where a fraction of the stolen statues went. This would be one of the most precious, and certainly one of the most beautiful. Why shouldn't some priest, or some small band of devotees, have decided to save it; cart it out of Delphi, and find sanctuary for it till the troubled times were over?"

"But—why here?"

"There used to be a track this way—the natives refer to it as the old track, and in these parts heaven knows how old it might be. I suppose the plan was to retrieve the statue later when things were safe, or even, if this happened at a very desperate time, to set up a sort of small secret sanctuary high on the mountain. If they'd just wanted to hide the statue, after all, they could have buried it, but they've *placed* it, haven't they? And with the Greek instinct for drama they've put it at the end of a dark tunnel, in the blazing light, and all its trappings round it.

"The priests who were so fanatical to save this statue must have known of the cave for long enough. Not only that—there was this inner shrine, full of light, the perfect 'bright citadel' for the god—so here he is. Look at that vine, Camilla, and that tree."

I looked at him stupidly. "The vine? It's a wild vine, isn't it? And the tree—is that a sort of laurel?"

"A bay. Apollo's laurel," said Simon softly.

"But, Simon, after two thousand years—"

"Trees live a long time, and when they die they leave seedlings. And vines run wild. Those were planted, Camilla. You notice how Apollo is just under the lip of the overhang, and the vines and that spindly tree make a screen? I don't know if you *can* get to the top of this light-well and look down, but you'd see nothing. And there is the spring. Yes, I think this was a sacred cave with a sacred spring, and what more natural than that the priest who was so eager to save his god should house him here? And I'll bet that if we look closely we'll find that the entrances to both inner and outer caves were artificially blocked up."

"They were. I noticed that. The slab that Dimitrios had moved was the same as the one that was across this inner tunnel."

"And then, after goodness knows how many years, the earthquakes opened the doors again. For Angelos. And Michael."

"*Michael!*" I looked at him almost guiltily. I had forgotten Michael. "Of course. Michael's letter. 'The bright citadel, Oh, Simon."

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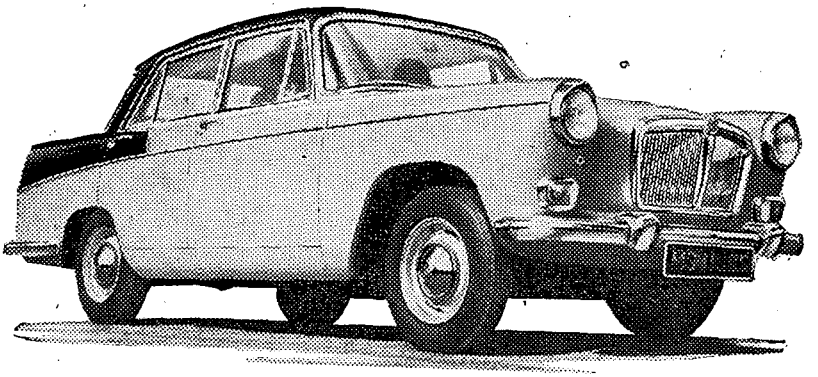

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He gave a little smile, and quoted it softly, " ' Tell the Emperor that the bright citadel is fallen to the ground. Apollo hath no longer any shelter, or oracular laurel tree, or speaking fountain. Even the vocal stream has ceased to flow.' Yes, Mick proved the Delphic Oracle wrong. That's what the letter meant. I never thought of anything like *this*." His voice didn't change, but suddenly I got the sharp impression of intense excitement. " My God," said Simon, " who could have imagined this? "

We stood side by side staring at the statue. I think it was the loveliest thing I have ever seen. The shadows played over the bloomed bronze of the body; the eyes dwelt on some remote distance beyond and above our heads, as the eyes of lions do. They were curiously alive, carefully inlaid with enamel and some black stone so that the dark pupils seemed to flicker and glow with the movement of light and shade. I knew of only one other statue that had eyes like that.

Simon echoed my thoughts, softly, " The Charioteer."

I said, " You think so? You think he's by the same hand? "

" I don't know a darned thing about it, but that's what he makes me think of."

" That's what he made Michael think of," I said.

He nodded. " And Nigel, too, if you remember. It was when we were talking about the Charioteer that Nigel seemed suddenly to make up his mind to tell me about this."

" It's not only the eyes," I said, " but the whole impression of strength going along with grace. A kind of liquid quality—no, that's the wrong word, it sounds too weak, whereas this is terrific. Simon, why shouldn't he be not only by the same hand, but part of the same group? It's only guesswork, isn't it, that the Charioteer was part of a victory statue for some potentate or other? Heavens above, if there were six thousand statues there, you'd think there might have been a chariot-statue of Apollo somewhere in Apollo's own sanctuary! Why shouldn't the Charioteer be the driver, and this—the god himself—the Lord of the Car? "

" Why not indeed? " said Simon.

" What are you smiling at? Why shouldn't I have a theory? "

" No reason at all. And it seems to *me* that one theory's as good as another. Yours at any rate is the most exciting. No, I was smiling at something quite different. Dimitrios."

" Oh! " It was like being jerked out of the sunlight into cold water. " I—I'd forgotten all about him."

" I should like to, now," said Simon. He had never taken his eyes off the statue. " But I'm afraid we must deal with that little matter before we come back to this."

" What do we do about it? " I asked, rather blankly.

He gave it one long look before he turned away. " We leave it here in its bright citadel, and we get back to the land of shadows, my dear. We know now what Michael found, and we also know why Michael was murdered. That chapter's closed, I think, with the death of Angelos. But the one that's still open is what we've

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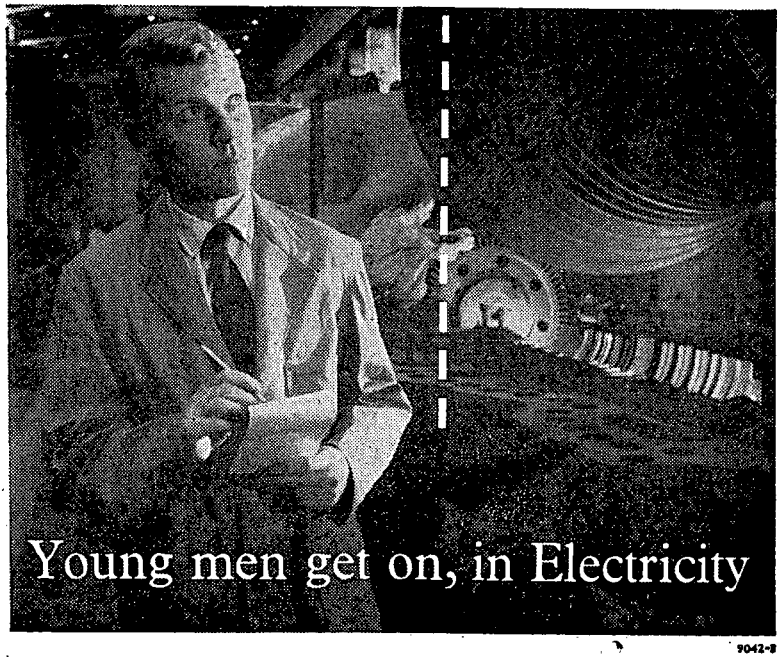

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got to deal with now. Nigel found the bright citadel, too, and I admit to feeling rather strongly that Dimitrios and Danielle shouldn't really be let in on—this."

I said violently, "They'll not touch it if I can stop them."

"Then we'd better get back to the cave and play watchdog."

He stood for a moment looking down at me. The guarded look was there again, with some expression behind the cool eyes that made me wonder what was coming. But he only said, rather lamely, "I shouldn't have let you come, Camilla."

I didn't answer.

He said, "You're frightened, aren't you?"

I wondered fleetingly why I didn't mind his knowing.

All at once he was very close to me, and his hand came under my chin, gently lifting my face to meet his gaze. "You know why I brought you, don't you?"

"Yes."

"And I was right."

"Yes. I know."

"You underrate yourself so shockingly, Camilla. You're not to play second fiddle any more. Understand?"

"Yes."

He hesitated, and then said, rather abruptly, "You made a discovery yesterday; remember? 'No man is an island.' It's true in more ways than one. Don't go on hating yourself because there are some things you can't do and can't face on your own. None of us can."

I didn't quite trust myself to answer. After a second or so I said lightly, "All I ask the gods is that one day I'll see you, too, shaken right out of that—that more-than-sufficient calmness of yours, on to the plane of mortals like me. The day that happens, I'll sacrifice to Apollo myself!"

He grinned. "I might have to hold you to that. But meanwhile you can be sure that it won't be friend Dimitrios that'll do it. I'm going back now to see if he's around—or Nigel. Would you rather stay through here?"

"No. I'll come with you. I—I'd like to know what's going on."

His lips touched my cheek, a moth's touch. "Then don't be scared, please. I'll not let Dimitrios get near you."

"All right. What do I do?"

"Nothing yet. Just keep out of sight, and do as you're told before you're told to do it."

"What could be simpler? Very well."

"And now we'll go back."

Apollo looked serenely over our heads as we turned and left the sunlight.

The cave was still empty. We waited in the shelter of the cleft, listening, and then Simon squeezed his way through without using the torch. After a minute or two I heard his voice softly in the dark. "It's all right. You can come through."

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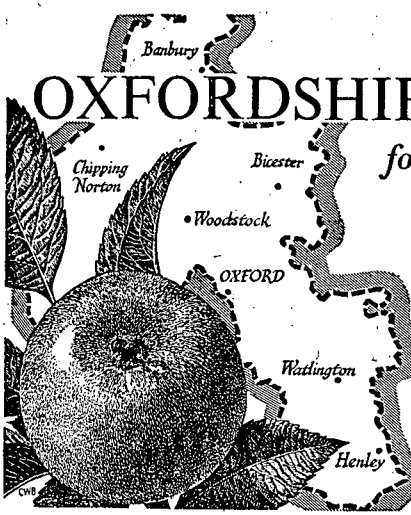

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I slid through the narrow opening. The beam of Simon's orch lit the way for me, and then played over the tilted slab. ' See? Those are chisel marks. You were right. The slab was iacked to fit across the opening. And the crack above, that'll ›e where the rock shifted in the tremor that opened up the cave gain for you and me—and Michael."

I ran a slightly unsteady finger along one of the marks. " Two housand years. Oh Simon, I wish we could know—" I stopped bruptly.

" Mm? " The torch was still moving over the old tool marks. Ie seemed absorbed.

I managed to whisper calmly enough, " He's coming back. I an hear him."

The torch snapped out. A moment's unbreathing silence.

" Yes. You get back through the cleft and wait till we see what ıe's up to. I hope to God it's Nigel."

As the breathed sentence ended I felt his hand on my arm. I beyed him, slipping back through the narrow opening to wait, ieart beating jerkily again, against the rock on the other side of the lab. I felt him beside me, pressed close to the edge of the cleft.

The steps came closer, hesitated at the door of the cave, and then ame in. The sounds were at once dulled by the dust and made ollower by the cave's echoes. They were succeeded by other ounds: the dull thud of a spade hacking at the pile of rubble; he chink as it struck stone, and then metal; the sounds of breath- ıg and effort; a soft expletive in Greek, then the splintering f wood and a thud; a dragging sound. He had uncovered a box nd was dragging it nearer the mouth of the cave.

I felt Simon's body, close to mine, tense like a runner's at the tarting-tape. His arm was across me, holding me still against him. t was like a steel bar. I wondered if he would attack Dimitrios ow, out of the dark.

But he didn't move, except to shift his shoulders and head lightly so that I thought he could see round the edge of the slab. Ie stayed like that for what seemed an age, rock-still. I could feel ıe pulse beating in the hollow of his elbow; it was unhurried. Aine, under it, was tumbling along anyhow like a faulty engine.

The arm relaxed. I felt him turn his head, and his breath was n my temple. I heard the barest thread of a whisper, " He's gone ut again. Did you hear a mule? "

" I don't think so."

" Stay here. I'll come back." A swift, compelling pressure of ıe arm round me, then it lifted. A movement beside me, the scrape f cloth on stone, and he was gone.

The cleft felt cold and damp. I shifted my shoulders with the ıdden chill, hunched my arms close to my sides and waited, stening. The echo of my coward pulses seemed to fill the cave.

I heard his steps in the dust just before he reached the cleft gain and slid through. It was warmer with him there. He bent is head and said softly, " He's left the box just inside the entrance

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and gone out again. He seems uneasy; I think he's wondering i anything's happened to whoever's coming with the mule. I thinl I'd better go after him."

He wasn't touching me, so he didn't feel the jerk of my heart He only heard me say, "Yes?" quite calmly.

"It's just on the cards something has happened to delay Nigel and I'd like to know what. And I want to know the way they'r taking. That track peters out very soon. I'll follow Dimitrio down till I see where he's bound, and then if a chance occurs I'l —well, deal with him."

"You mean you'll *kill* him?"

"Lord, no. But I'd like him put safely out of action whil we get time to work this thing out our own way. And now must go, or I'll lose the blighter."

I hadn't realised that my hand had gone up to the breast of hi shirt. His came up to cover it, warm and steadying. I said, and couldn't quite keep the shake out of my voice, "Simon, take care.

"Be sure of that. Now, don't worry, my— don't worry. I' be all right, and so will you. Stay here under cover. You'll b safe in this part of the cave, and anyway I promise you I won't le Dimitrios out of my sight. Right?"

His other arm came round my shoulders, and momentarily h pulled me against him. I thought his lips brushed my hair.

For the second time the arm dropped from my shoulders an he turned away as swiftly and lightly as a ghost. This time h switched on his torch, and I saw his shadow leap back, gigantic along the wall of the cleft as he slipped through. I pressed for ward till I could see into the cave. The little circle of light dance away through the faintly echoing spaces of darkness. Simor moving swiftly, himself a shadow, dwindled across the empt darkness and was gone like a wraith into the outer tunnel. shadow flickered back over the rock, then darkness swallowed i

My hands were spread flat against the inner side of the slal My eyes ached with the darkness. It was cold again.

I had to exert all my self-control to stop myself running out an across the cave after him into the blessed sunlight.

At length I turned and made my way rather drearily back t the bright solitude of Apollo's sanctuary.

Soon the very beauty and stillness of the place began to oppre me. I found I could sit still no longer and, getting to my feet, picked up Nigel's water-pot and carried it over to the sprin Under the thin trickle I rinsed it carefully and drank.

I rummaged in Simon's haversack and found what remained our food, half of which I ate. Then I fidgeted about the litt glade, examining the statue more closely, looking—but witho touching them—at the broken pieces of gold in the grass, fingerir the leaves and ferns.

When I found myself stooping for a third time to drink at th spring, I realised that fear had given place to a sort of impatie irritation. Sunlight and peace had done their work too well:

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was now thoroughly on the fidget. I found myself glancing almost second by second at the watch on my wrist—an automatic act which irritated my nerves still further, as I hadn't the remotest idea what time it had been when Simon left me.

I hovered near the mouth of the tunnel, fingering my torch.

After all, I told myself, I was perfectly safe. Simon was with Dimitrios, and I wasn't in the least afraid of Nigel. I wanted something to do; I wanted to know what was going on; I wanted Simon's presence.

I went cautiously along the tunnel, back into darkness, hesitated in the shelter of the slab, then let myself through into the main cave. I, too, used my torch this time.

A last absurd jump of the nerves made me send the light skating once round the vaulted darkness, almost as if I expected to find that Dimitrios had not gone.

But the place was empty. There was nothing to be afraid of.

The torch-beam was steady now. I went softly across to the arch of the outer tunnel, and then turned off the light. I felt my way carefully along the wall of the curving passage until, as I rounded the first bend, the darkness slackened, and I could see.

There was no box standing beside the entrance. Dimitrios must have set off carrying it. So much the better, I thought vaguely. It meant he did intend to go right down to the jeep; and it would slow him up and make it easier for Simon to follow.

I edged forward until I could see out into the corrie.

Again that faint sense of surprise assailed me to see it unchanged: dazzlingly-hot, still, deserted.

The glare hit at the eyes. I could smell the dust and the mule-dung and some dried aromatic plant that crumbled to powder under the hand I put up to the rock beside me. There was no sound at all. Nothing moved; even the hot air hung still.

I hesitated. The temptation to get out of the cave was strong, to climb the cliff-path and take refuge higher up the mountain where I could at once be free and yet hidden—and see any movement that there might chance to be near the corrie.

But Simon must know where to find me. I must stay.

I went back into the cave.

The beam of my torch suddenly dimmed, then brightened again. But the warning spurred me into movement.

With only one brief glance back at the entrance, and a couple of seconds' pause to listen for sounds of Dimitrios' approach, I set myself to a careful exploration of the cave.

I don't quite know what I was looking for. But it wasn't very long before I did in fact come on evidence of another cache.

In a deep bay between two pillars at the edge of the cave not far from the pile of boxes, a pile of rubble—a shallow barrow of the stuff heaped away in a bay of rock—looked as if it had been recently disturbed. I approached it, sending the now perceptibly dimming beam probing among the fragments.

Quite clear in the dust at my feet was the print of a rope-soled

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shoe, and the marks beside it as of something being dragged.

I went closer and stooped to peer. The beam slid over the pile, caught on something, and halted. It jerked in my hand once, then fixed, still and far too bright now, on what lay behind the pile of rock and dirt.

The murderer hadn't bothered to bury Nigel. His body had been dragged and then flung into this meagre hiding-place, and now lay, stiff and horrible and indescribably grotesque, between the heaped rubble and the wall of the cave.

In the paralysed moment before I dropped the torch from a numbed hand, and let the merciful darkness loose again, I saw what had happened to Nigel. You can see an awful lot in a split second's acute terror and shock: the picture your brain registers then is complete, the stuff of a million lingering nightmares still to come. Nothing is missed: every bestial detail is there. . .

He had been tied. The rope had gone now—no doubt the murderer had need of it—but the boy's wrists were scored raw where he had struggled.

He had been tied and tortured. In that one glance I had seen the shabby green shirt ripped down off one thin shoulder and, on the upper arm, shocking against the peeling skin, a series of marks whose sickening regularity could mean only one thing. He had been burnt four or five times, deliberately.

Other things I saw that at the time meant nothing, but which in nightmare recapitulations of that second's horror I have since seen and recognised a score of times. I don't intend to describe them. Let it remain that Nigel had died in pain. His eyes were open. I remember how they gleamed in the light of the torch.

And his teeth clenched, grinning, on some fragment that might have been skin—Dimitrios' bitten thumb—the filthy murderous hand that had slid down my arm yesterday on the Roseate cliff.

It was on that flash of realisation that the torch dropped and the dark stamped down. I don't know what happened then. I remember one moment the picture in the torchlight, vivid, terrible, complete, then the next moment it was dark, and the rock was cold; it was crushing me, tearing my clothes, tripping my running footsteps; it was soft to my falling, whimpering body . . .

I was lying at Apollo's feet on the damp moss. My hair was wet, and my hands, and the breast of my frock. Something was hurting my right hand where it pressed deeply into the grass. It was the broken end of the gold arrow.

I sat looking at it for a very long time before I even saw it.

Dimitrios, I was thinking stupidly, confusedly. Dimitrios. He had murdered Nigel yesterday. While we had been here in the corrie, in the bright sunlight, Nigel had been in the cave with his murderer, tied and hurt and—no, that wouldn't do; he hadn't been gagged, and we'd have heard him. He was dead before we got up here, and then Dimitrios had come down to Delphi to search his room.

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I stared down at the beautifully-worked fragment of gold in my hand, and tried to think. But all that would come to me was that Nigel, poor, muddled, eager Nigel, who was a good artist, had been murdered by Dimitrios.

Dimitrios! This time the thought came anything but confusedly: it whipped into my brain with a point as sharp as the one that pricked my palm. I was on my feet, and the gold arrow spun glittering, forgotten, to the grass. Dimitrios, whom Simon and I had casually dismissed as someone who could easily be dealt with —Dimitrios was out there on the hillside, and Simon was tailing him, waiting for a chance to attack him, unconscious of the fact that the Greek was a murderer as vile and ruthless as ever his cousin Angelos had been.

Momentarily I had forgotten poor Nigel. I ran back into the tunnel with never a thought of what lay there in the cave.

The darkness came up against me like a tangling net. I had to feel my way forward slowly.

I reached the slab. I pressed my body into the narrow cleft, craning to peer forward into the cave. But I couldn't see at all; the darkness boiled still against my wide-open eyes with shapes and spangles of a million fizzing colours. Without my torch, and blinded like this by my swift dive back out of the light, I would be helpless to cross the cave. I shut my eyes and waited there for the swarming dark to clear. The slab felt cold and damp under my flat-spread hands.

Then I heard him.

I knew it was the soft tread of rope-soled shoes in the dust.

I stayed where I was, frozen to the rock, and opened my eyes.

I could see now. Light was moving in the cave, a powerful light. Not Simon—Simon's torch, like mine, had begun to fail. And in any case, the steps had not been Simon's. But at least where Dimitrios was, Simon would be. And from the way the Greek came forward into the cave with unhurried confidence, he still didn't know of Simon's presence.

Even as the thought came, I heard a tiny sound outside the cave. My eyes flew in apprehension to the Greek. He was behind the light and I couldn't see him, but the moving beam never faltered. He hadn't heard. The sound came again, and now I knew it for what it was: the chink of metal as a bit jangled. Dimitrios had brought the mule.

The Greek passed out of my small range of vision. I waited till I heard the familiar scrape and shift of a box and the clatter of settling stones, and the grunts and short breathing of effort. Then I inched my way nearer the edge of the slab and peered round it.

He had put the torch in a little niche above him, so that the beam was directed on to the rock-pile. His thick powerful body was stooping over this.

His back was towards me: he had laid his jacket down beside him, and under the shirt I could see the bulge and play of his muscles as he heaved at one of the half-buried boxes.

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He dragged it out into his arms, and straightened up holding it. I hadn't realised how immensely strong he must be. He carried the box slowly over to the cave-mouth and went out of sight with it up into the tunnel. I heard him dump it there. I heard him coming back. Still with that unhurried soft tread he came out of the tunnel into the steady beam that illumined the cave.

For the second time in those few minutes, I felt the kick of shock over the heart.

It wasn't Dimitrios. It wasn't anyone I had seen before.

But hard on the moment of shock and confusion, I knew that I was wrong. I had seen him before, and more than once.

Now, faced in the queerly-lit darkness with that heavy head, the thick dark curls tight like a bull's and crisping down the swarthy cheekbones towards the smiling thick-lipped mouth, I knew him.

This was the head of Nigel's drawing: this was the face like an archaic statue's, with the wide fleshy cheekbones and the up-cornered, tight-lipped smile. And more—this was the face I had seen, unnoticing and unremembering, bending over the engine of the jeep outside Dimitrios' cottage.

Two other memories flashed, sparks into the dry tinder of fear: Nigel snatching back the drawing and saying, "It's someone I saw on Parnassus," and Simon's voice in the dark, translating for me something Stephanos had told him, "He'd kill, and smile while he did it. Always that smile."

Angelos. Angelos himself. And Dimitrios was heaven knew where. And Simon was with him.

Angelos turned back to the pile of rubble. The torchlight slid over the thick skin shiny with sweat. The smile never altered. No doubt he had smiled as he and Dimitrios killed Nigel between them. No doubt he would smile when Simon, having disposed of Dimitrios, came openly up to the cave to find me.

Angelos straightened his thick body and stood still, as if listening. He turned his head. There was sounds outside, not of metal, this time, but the sounds of someone hurrying towards the cave.

I remember thinking with a kind of numbed calmness that if I screamed, it would warn Simon—but it would warn Angelos, too. He was expecting Dimitrios, and he could have no idea that Simon and I were here. He had made no move to douse the torch. But on the other hand, if Simon had dealt with Dimitrios, Simon too would be off his guard.

The steps came closer, were in the tunnel. Angelos' hand went to his pocket. I took in my breath.

With a stumbling rush and a flurry of breathing, Danielle hurried into the cave. . .

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★ ***The last part of My Brother Michael by Mary Stewart appears in next month's ARGOSY***

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ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

★

Solution on Page 105

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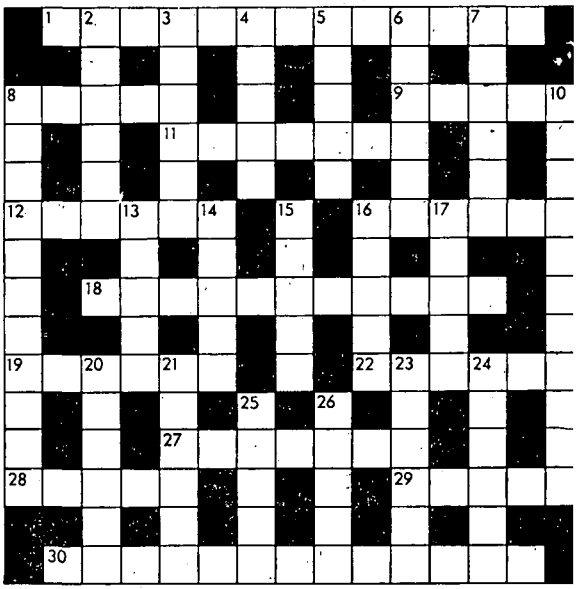

CLUES

Across

1 I lent Mary upset after printer's flattering (13).

8 It revolves either way (5).

9 Seat without a bob—rot ! (5).

11 " Where all the —— are paved with gold " (Colman) (7).

12 Side east of Fife town (6).

16 Join overlapping planks (6).

18 Gag to regain mixed-up assembly (11).

19 Stick in bad heresy (6).

22 Hamster, for instance (6).

27 The wreath's more than grand (7).

28 Wander or make mistake (5).

29 " —— —— would lie down " (Lord Rendel) (1, 4).

30 Birdie fanciers often work in the dark (13).

Down

2 To cave wildly, to compose a verse (6).

3 Chase little more than a purse (6).

4 Four or Yeoman on keyboard (5).

5 Primary stage direction (5).

6 Wood in goal attempt but no use (6).

7 The vegetable for an artist (6).

8 Rosemary's for it (11).

10 Out of custom delivering fugitive (11).

13 Woolly fever aft five (5).

14 Never confour audacity (5).

15 Audible breaths ha glazed sound (5).

16 He's a bit of a go (5).

17 This stomach go with stiff neck (5).

20 River in the heath cosy (6).

21 Sorrow is mo than Scots cry (6).

23 Fairly aged Olyr piad plat du jour ? (6

24 Iced cake som times leads to explan tions (6).

25 Take it off writi and squeeze (5).

26 The Indian Arn are after the man madness ! (5).

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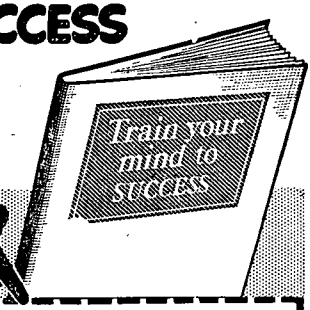

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